

**Windsor, North Carolina**  
**June 15, 2020**  
**BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met today for their advertised Budget Public Hearing in the Commissioners Room, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was hosted partially in person, and partially via Zoom (conference call). The following members were present or absent:

Present:           Ronald “Ron” Wesson, District I  
                      Greg Atkins, District II  
                      Tammy A. Lee, District III (**Zoom**)  
                      John Trent, District IV (**Zoom**)  
                      Ernestine (Byrd) Bazemore, District V (**Zoom**)

Absent:           None

Staff Present: County Manager Juan Vaughan, II.  
                  Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston  
                  Finance Director William Roberson

Staff Present (Zoom): Clerk to the Board Sarah Tinkham  
                          Maintenance Superintendent Anthony Rascoe  
                          Water Superintendent Ricky Spivey

Thadd White of the Bertie Ledger-Advance was present from the media via Zoom.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Wesson called the meeting to order, and thanked those present for attending in person and via Zoom. He then requested that the Clerk to the Board call the roll.

## ROLL CALL

All Commissioners were present either in person or via Zoom.

The two Commissioners present in person were Chair Wesson and Commissioner Atkins.

Vice Chair Lee, Commissioner Bazemore, and Commissioner Trent were remotely present on the Zoom call.

## INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Wesson gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## BUDGET HIGHLIGHT SUMMARY

County Manager Vaughan provided a brief summary of the work that had taken place already on the proposed budget. He noted that this upcoming year's budget is "lean," and accounts for a tax collection rate of 96% with a tax rate of 86.5% per \$100 of assessed value. There's also no appropriation of the County's fund balance in this proposed budget. The overall budget is listed as \$38,062,545.

In addition, the County completed its required revaluation this year, and also secured \$558,000 through the Coronavirus Relief Fund which both contribute to County revenue.

In regards to expenditures, several factors addressed those concerns including a 5% reduction to most county departments. Also, in the recommended budget, no additional funds were allocated under the Special Appropriations category. However, several changes were made to the budget upon the completion of the Board's budget work session. The changes made are as follows:

<b>Amount</b>	<b>Line Items Reduced</b>	<b>Initially Recommended</b>	<b>Final</b>
\$5,000	Historic Hope Plantation	\$25,000	\$20,000
\$7,800	Governing Body – Group Insurance	\$35,294	\$27,494
\$10,000	Governing Body – Travel	\$50,000	\$40,000
<b>\$22,800</b>	<b>Total</b>		

<b>Amount</b>	<b>Line Items Increased</b>	<b>Initially Recommended</b>	<b>Final</b>
\$2,000	Airport	\$20,000	\$22,000
\$20,800	Martin Community College Capital Outlay	\$31,500	\$52,300

\$22,800	Total		
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At this time, County Manager Vaughan opened the floor to the Board for any comments or questions.

Commissioner Bazemore noted her concern with the cut to the Maintenance Department budget. It was her fear that cutting maintenance needs could present a significant challenge for the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the intensification of this year's hurricane season.

County Manager Vaughan thanked her for her comments, and requested guidance from the Board on how to properly address this concern.

Commissioner Bazemore inquired which county department(s) received in excess of \$5,000. Mr. Vaughan responded that the only significant increase was made for Martin Community College capital outlay under special appropriations.

Mr. Vaughan reinforced that each County department with the exception of Finance and Elections, were decreased by approximately 5%.

Commissioner Atkins shared Commissioner Bazemore's concerns.

Commissioner Bazemore noted that she would like to make sure the Maintenance Department had what they needed in the upcoming year, and recognized that the Roanoke-Chowan Community College did not receive an additional allocation while Martin Community College saw a significant increase that what was originally proposed.

County Manager Vaughan stated that these comments would be taken under advisement.

### **PUBLIC HEARING FOR FY2020-2021 County budget**

At this time, Chair Wesson opened the public hearing.

He noted that two public comments had been received in advance of tonight's meeting. Chair Wesson requested that the Clerk to the Board read the first comment into the record. The first public comment was received from Mike Hoggard with the NC Forestry Service:

*Sarah, & Bertie County Commissioners*

*I have recently seen the proposal to keep the NCFS budget same as it was last year. The increase is to pay for a type 6 engine and some other equipment to support the 2nd assistant county ranger position that the county approved 2018. We got a 2006 truck to make out with for a couple of years for transportation for the position. At that time, I told the commissioners and county manager we would hold off on support equipment for a couple of years. As far as the pay raises the legislator approve a 5% increase last year 2.5% 19/20 and 2.5% 20/21. The state may not give us the money either but any amount we don't get from the state 60% the county will also save their 40% share.*

*Thanks for your consideration on this matter*

Chair Wesson thanked Mr. Hoggard for his comments, and noted that the Board would take them under advisement, and that the Board also discussed this matter at their budget work session. The Chairman also noted that the Board was hopeful that more funds would be available in the near future to address projects not originally budgeted for in the current proposal.

The second public comment was received from Tuesday Sauer and it read:

*Dear Chairman Wesson and Bertie County Board of Commissioners:*

*Please accept my thanks for your hard work on completing this budget for the upcoming fiscal year while attempting to balance the priorities the board has for this county. I recognize that the fiscal challenges are many, and am grateful that you have chosen to be prudent with our tax dollars. Please also thank County Manager Vaughan and Finance Director Robertson for what I am sure was many hours of hard work.*

*My one concern to voice with this budget is the assertion by both the Chairman and the County Manager that there will be no tax increase for this upcoming fiscal year. I watched incredulously while the manager spoke during the recent COVID town hall meeting and said “We are aware of how this pandemic has affected our local economy and that has contributed to the reason I did not recommend increasing the tax rate here in Bertie County for the upcoming fiscal year beginning July 1st, and I’m sure our commissioners will do their best to ensure that doesn’t happen as well”. While this statement is technically correct regarding the tax \*\*rate\*\*, the underlying insinuation is that management is really looking out for the taxpayers and holding their taxes down during this tough fiscal time for most households. The local newspaper had the headline “No tax hike slated” with regards to the budget, which was blatantly untrue. The Chairman said in a recent budget workshop “I don’t know of a single other county that’s not having a tax increase”. As you all well know, the county recently underwent revaluation and the tax values in the county did have a jump in value. You all also are aware that the general public has to be informed what the “revenue neutral” rate is with regards to the new valuation amounts. I did note the worksheet on the county’s website and did both read a brief mention of it in the manager’s budget message and heard a blurb about it while he completed his budget presentation on June 1st. If we all were truly not having a tax increase our tax rates would actually decrease in most cases. I know from doing a bit of research that each and every one of you personally are going to sustain a tax increase, ranging from 4.22% up to 9% among the group. My husband and I will see a 31.2% increase in our property taxes. When we all receive our tax bills they are the product of 2 numbers: tax rate and property value. If property value increases and the tax rate holds the same we will have a tax increase. The taxpayers have a right to a truthful explanation of this budget and the amount of taxes which will be collected, and in a way that is understandable to the general taxpaying public. When the tax bills are sent out in August, long after the ink is dry on this budget, imagine the shock when folks think they are NOT having a tax increase. By that time, it will be too late for the taxpayers to register any commentary on this budget. Lastly, a quick cursory review of the surrounding counties has found that no other county around is proposing a tax*

*increase and Northampton county, in fact, is having a 1/2 cent tax decrease. Bertie county will have the unfortunate distinction of being the only county in our area with a tax increase. Let's not sugarcoat this or play semantics.*

*Thank you for your consideration and time.*

Chair Wesson thanked Mrs. Sauer for her comments, and noted that the County was not required to use the revenue neutral rate, but that the County was required to complete revaluation every eight (8) years. The County is not involved in the revaluation process, and it is completely by an independent firm that is well known in county government. He appreciated her thoughts, and also highlighted that the tax rate remains the same for the new fiscal year beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>.

No other comments were made by the Board in response to Mrs. Sauer's comment.

Chair Wesson inquired if any additional public comments had been submitted. The Clerk noted that no additional comments had been received.

In response, Chair Wesson noted that public comments could be submitted to the Clerk to the Board's office via email. He reiterated that citizens have 24-hours to submit any comments or concerns about the proposed budget.

The Chairman allowed an additional five (5) minutes before closing the public hearing.

With no further comments received, Chair Wesson closed the public hearing.

The public comment period will end at 7:00 PM tomorrow, June 16<sup>th</sup>.

### **RECESS**

Chair Wesson called for a motion to recess tonight's public hearing until Thursday, June 18 at 10:00 AM in the same location. Commissioner Atkins made a **MOTION** to recess until that day, time, and location. Commissioner Lee **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.

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Ronald Wesson, Chairman

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Sarah Tinkham, Clerk to the Board