

Windsor, North Carolina
January 4, 2021
REGULAR MEETING

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for a regularly scheduled meeting today inside 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
 John Trent, District IV

Absent: None

Staff Present: County Manager Juan Vaughan, II
 County Attorney Lloyd C. Smith, Jr.
 Finance Director William Roberson

Staff Present (Zoom): HR/Risk Management Director Cortney Ward

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Lee called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Wesson gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Lee stated that there are rules for public comments that can be found on the Facebook page and the website. Chair Lee asked Director Cortney Ward if there were any public comments.

Director Cortney Ward began by providing a brief overview of the public comments’ rules and procedures.

Director Cortney Ward stated the first public comment to present was from Chair Wesley Dudley of the Bertie County Democratic Party: “The Bertie County Democratic Party would like to extend a warm appreciation for the consideration of their nominee Mr. James Lee for the vacated District V Commissioners seat in accordance with NCGS.”

Director Cortney Ward stated the next public comment was from Mr. James Pugh, who stated he was writing to ask the Board of Commissioners to please respect the nomination of the Bertie County Democratic Party for Mr. James Lee to fill the vacant seat, previously held by Mrs. Ernestine Bazemore.

Director Cortney Ward stated the next public comment was from Pastor Samuel Shaw of Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church in support of the Democratic nomination for Mr. James Lee to fill the vacant seat previously held by Mrs. Bazemore.

Director Cortney Ward stated the next public comment came from John Davis, whose letter stated that Mr. James Lee was fully qualified with a seventy-six percent vote from the Democratic Party Leadership to fill the vacant seat of Ms. Bazemore. As read by Director Cortney Ward, the letter further stated that Mr. Davis hopes the board would support the recommendation of the Democratic Party Leadership to allow Mr. James Lee to fill the vacant seat previously held by Mrs. Bazemore.

Director Cortney Ward stated the final comment was from Dr. Kenny Barber. Dr. Barber stated that his opinion was strictly nonpartisan and he presently speaks in a nonpartisan voice. Mr. Barber’s letter stated that any office of government that is fair and just should automatically govern according to the will of the people’s majority when logical and reasonable. If any elected official fails to do this simple task, they are saying to the people that their personal agenda is more important than your group agenda. The vacant position previously held by Senator-Elect Ernestine Bazemore is one of legacy and honor. Dr. Barber further stated it is his hope that due to the pain and suffering of this Tier 1 county that The Board of Commissioners have already decided to accept the people’s majority so that we can move on to greater accomplishments for the betterment of Bertie County and its citizens.

Chair Lee publicly thanked the citizens who came to the rescue and assisted the deputy whose car recently caught fire after an accident.

APPOINTMENTS & REPORTS

2021 Crossroads Magazine by Anna Phipps of the Roanoke-Chowan News Herald

Anna thanked everyone for allowing her to come and discuss the magazine. Anna stated that the Crossroads Magazine is one of the most important pieces they publish as it is a comprehensive look at the Roanoke-Chowan area. For the 2021 edition, the editorial staff will seek out the unique stories behind the historical markers that got the Roanoke-Chowan area landscaped. The Roanoke-Chowan News Herald will print 9,000 copies that will be inserted in their paid publications on February 24th and February 25th. The readership includes Bertie, Hertford, and Northampton counties. They will also distribute additional copies to the Chamber of Commerce offices, Economic Development government offices, and Welcome Centers. Anna requested support again this year.

Commissioner Wesson made a **MOTION** to purchase page three again and the add-on for one-hundred dollars. Commissioner Trent **SECONDED** the motion. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.

Library & Cooperative Extension Construction Project Update by MHA Works Project Architects Amber Idol & Dani Hoff

Amber Idol provided a brief update beginning with the good news that this month's progress is on target. However, the site is still extremely wet, so the parking lot has not been paved yet. The two items mentioned in previous meetings that remain hold-ups are (1) the two-hour glazing that is along the library wall that separates the library faces and the gallery and (2) the other windows for the exterior, which will be on site next week.

Commissioner Wesson asked about the anticipated completion date at this point. Amber stated at this point, it really depends on the building inspector and whether he's going to allow people to move in, and having the parking lot paved. Amber stated they would know better in a couple of weeks when things progress. She stated the building will be ready, so we should still be able to have the ribbon cutting in March.

Emergency Management Financial Update by Colleton Software Senior Vice President Dave Pickren

Mr. Pickren stated Thomas Smith, who is in their Irwin, SC office and handles Non-Emergency Transport (NET), was also on the call. They followed up with some of items that came up in the October meeting. They reviewed figures for NET from calendar year 2020 and how they anticipate finishing 2021.

Mr. Smith stated things are going in the right direction. They completed the first wave up paperwork and billed roughly \$70,000 to \$80,000 worth of charges. On top of that, they have an additional \$70,000 to \$80,000 worth of charges pending, basically on the Medicare side. This month Medicare has finally loosened their requirements for paperwork, understanding we are in the midst of a pandemic.

Mr. Pickren added that it has been a collaborative effort with Director Mitch Cooper and Bertie County. Weekly calls have been held while working with Governor Cooper's staff to obtain the necessary information. The end goal is to get the County paid. Mr. Pickren stated they have cleared somewhere between \$55,000 to \$60,000 in the past 90 days. This is something they will continue to work on probably for years to come.

Commissioner Wesson asked how much of the gap has been closed regarding where we were when we last spoke in October compared to what you're now anticipating. Mr. Pickren stated he estimated about another \$100,000 to \$125,000 from calls in 2020 that they're working to receive.

Commissioner Trent asked Mr. Pickren what the collection rate is right now. Mr. Pickren stated the collection rate for the County is running about 72 to 73 percent and on the non-emergent it's about 78 to 80 percent. Mr. Pickren also stated it was actually a little bit ahead. On the 911 side,

we are ahead as well. Dave stated he likes to see the non-emergent side above 80. A goal of 80 percent has been set and they are working to get to that goal.

Chair Lee thanked Emergency Management and Colleton Software for their hard work.

Appointment of Bertie County Commissioner Representing District V

Chair Lee opened the floor for nominations. Commissioner Trent nominated Ron Roberson. Commissioner Atkins seconded this nomination.

Commissioner Wesson nominated the recommendation of the Democratic Party, Mr. James Lee.

Commissioner Wesson then a called point of order and requested to read the following statement into record: “The citizens of this county have a right to know that this vote we are about to take has been rigged from the very start. These three Commissioners Mr. Trent, Mrs. Lee, and Mr. Atkins communicated together and decided to elect Mr. Roberson prior to the Democratic Party having a chance to interview and recommend a candidate from their party as required by General Statutes. Mr. Trent, an Independent, approached Mrs. Lee and she agreed to support Mr. Roberson and they both approached Mr. Atkins and sought his support. Mr. Wesson stated that Mr. Roberson called him directly and asked him if he would support him. Mr. Wesson stated he told Mr. Roberson clearly that he would support the nominee of the Democratic Party and if that turned out to be him, he would support that decision. Mr. Roberson then thanked him and stated that he already had the support of the other commissioners. Commissioner Wesson stated that he then called Commissioner Atkins and asked if this was true. Mr. Atkins confirmed that Mr. Trent had first gone to Mrs. Lee and they both encouraged him to support Mr. Roberson. He then told him that he was favoring Mr. Roberson but had not yet made up his mind and understands now that may have changed. But what now makes this now especially egregious is that the Democratic Party did things the right way. They sought all candidates who expressed interest and after interviewing all four candidates publicly, they asked the precinct chair, the vice chair, and the elected party officials to discuss the candidates with the citizens of their precinct across the county before voting. Mr. Lee received 76 percent of all the votes, more than three out of four of every vote casts. Mr. Roberson was one of the candidates interviewed, but was not selected. But, the fix was already in. These commissioners have in essence said the hell with the will of these citizens and they made that decision prior to ever starting. Didn’t anyone say we should listen to the recommendation of the Democratic Party as required statutorily before making any decisions as to who would fill this seat? That never happened. This is wrong and this is a perfect example of what is wrong with our government today. Those elected to listen to the citizens, all too often, decide what they want to do before they listen to the people. Thank you very much.”

Commissioner Atkins stated he takes issue with the term “rigged” being used.

Chair Lee also stated she did not appreciate the use of the term “rigged” because it was not rigged. She stated she received a call from Mr. Trent and she informed him she had not made up her mind about who to vote for to fill the current vacancy. However, after talking to others, including her husband, who holds Mr. Roberson in high regards, and after Mr. Roberson

contacted her and shared his qualifications and why he wanted to serve, she did agree to support Mr. Roberson.

Commissioner Wesson stated rigged was the correct word and a better word might be collusion because General Statute advises us to hear the recommendation. He stated that what he understands and what was just confirmed was that the decision was made prior to the Democratic Party being notified to provide a recommendation.

Commissioner Atkins asked Commissioner Wesson if he recalled calling him twice.

Commissioner Wesson confirmed that he did call to verify what he was told by Mr. Roberson and informed Commissioner Atkins that he would be supporting the recommendation of the Democratic Party.

Chair Lee and Commissioner Atkins stated they weren't asked by Commissioner Trent to vote for Mr. Roberson, but rather, Commissioner Trent informed them he was voting for Mr. Roberson.

Commissioner Wesson asked why he nor Ms. Bazemore were contacted since Commissioners Trent, Atkins, and Lee had been in communication.

Chair Lee stated Ms. Bazemore does not have a vote in this decision.

A vote was taken to appoint Ron Roberson to fill the remainder of Ms. Ernestine Bazemore's term. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 3-1 vote. The dissenting vote was cast by Commissioner Wesson.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve Minutes for Work Session 10-19-20
2. Approve Minutes for Regular Meeting 11-2-20
3. Approve Minutes for Closed Session 11-2-20
4. Approve Minutes for Regular Meeting 12-7-20
5. Approve Minutes for Closed Session 12-7-20
6. Resolution in Support of NCACC Presidential Initiative to Promote Food System Resiliency

A **MOTION** was made to accept Consent Agenda items 1-5 by Commissioner Trent. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Atkins. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.

The Resolution in Support of NCACC Presidential Initiative to Promote Food System Resiliency was read by County Manager Juan Vaughan.

Commissioner Wesson made the **MOTION** to approve this resolution and the **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Trent. The **MOTION PASSED** with a 5-0 vote.

OTHER ITEMS
DISCUSSION AGEND (D)

Update on Joint Meeting with Martin County and Chowan County Managers and Commissioners regarding Regional Jail Project

County Manager Vaughan stated that he, Chair Lee, and Vice Chair Trent attended a meeting with the County Managers of Chowan County and Martin County along with two Commissioners from Martin County and one Commissioner from Chowan County to further discuss the funding of the Regional Jail project that has been presented to the Board. County Manager Vaughan stated that in the meeting, there was consensus for each board to approach each of their legislators to look for support/funding for that project. County Manager Vaughan stated that no decisions were made with regards to a commitment to the project. However, all Commissioners in attendance did agree to pursue funding and they were going to do that by approaching their legislators and each County Manager would come back and let each manager know exactly what was discussed and what progress has been made within each county.

Chair Lee stated that she had contacted Representative Goodwin and he likes the idea and was going to get with others who represent those three counties to see what could be done once they go back into session.

Commissioner Wesson stated that it would be a good idea to get Senator Bazemore involved as her assistance could certainly be used.

Confirm Work Session on 1/20/21 and Swearing-In of Newly Appointed Commissioner

Chair Lee stated the Work Session would be at 10:00 AM and asked the County Manager to ensure it ended by 2:00 or 2:30 PM. Chair Lee asked County Manager Vaughan if he would set up the swearing in and County Manager Vaughan confirmed he would so.

Calendar Review

- January 14-15th-Legislative Goals Conference (Virtual)
- January 22nd-Essentials of County Government Roles and Responsibilities (Virtual)
- February 25th-Essentials of County Government, Session 2: Budgets, Audit & Fiduciary Duty (Virtual)

COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS (E)

Vice Chair Trent

Vice Chair Trent stated that he had no report.

Commissioner Wesson

Commissioner Wesson stated he was contacted by a lot of residents in his district who are on Woodard Road and the area affected by the last tornado. Commissioner Wesson described some pictures he has of the flooding in the ditches and yards in that tornado-affected area. Commissioner Wesson stated that two weeks ago, DOT began some major work in that area. DOT stated that they are committed to coming back and paving on Woodard Road and Morning Road as soon as the weather permits. Commissioner Wesson announced that the County received a \$140,000-grant from the Emergency Watershed Protection Program. That money will be spent clearing ditches as soon as possible.

Commissioner Atkins

Commissioner Atkins stated he no report.

Chair Lee

Chair Lee stated that furniture would begin being moved in the Tri-County Airport next week. She further stated that there is still a water issue and a fire hydrant issue they are working to resolve. Chair Lee stated she received a picture from Mayor Harrell of the flooding in the Long Branch community. There is a beaver problem in that community and they also have some ditches that need cleaning. DOT is supposed to take a look at that as well. Chair Lee stated that she spoke to several people about paying to remove the beaver issue. There is a possibility of some of the residents sharing the costs of having the beaver dam removed.

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORTS (F)

County Manger Vaughan stated that the Family's First Coronavirus Response Act, also known as FFCRA, required employers to provide employer-paid sick leave to employees affected by

COVID-19. This requirement expired on December 31st and has not been extended. We have contacted neighboring counties to learn what other local governments are providing. County Manager Vaughan stated that would be an agenda item for the upcoming work session on January 20th. Manager Vaughan stated determining the details of how the County would continue providing this leave for employees is important because without it, employees would be required to use their own leave.

COUNTY ATTORNEY'S REPORTS (G)

County Attorney Lloyd Smith, Jr. stated he would be emailing the Board of Commissioners a copy of the Ted Cherry complaint on tomorrow. He asked Chair Lee to come by his office to verify and sign the complaint. Attorney Smith stated he was unsure as to when court would reopen, but it is slated to reopen January 14th. However, as soon as the complaint is signed, Mr. Cherry will be served and the process will begin.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Director Cortney Ward stated she had one comment come in the chat box. The comment was from Lalitha Ward. The comment stated, "As a citizen of Bertie County, I want to thank you for subverting the will of the people."

ADJOURN

A **MOTION** was made to adjourn by Commissioner Trent. The **MOTION** to adjourn was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Wesson. The **MOTION PASSED** unanimously.