

Windsor, North Carolina
April 7, 2021
WORK SESSION

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners met for a work session meeting today inside the Council on Aging Gymnasium 103 West School Dr, Windsor, NC. Because of 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: Greg Atkins, District II
Tammy A. Lee, District III
John Trent, District IV
Ronald “Ron” Roberson, District V

Absent: Ronald “Ron” Wesson, District I

Staff Present: County Manager Juan Vaughan II
Assistant County Attorney Jonathan Huddleston
Clerk to The Board LaShonda Cartwright (Zoom)
Human Resource Director Cortney Ward (Zoom)

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Lee called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Lee provided the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

UPDATE & DISCUSSION OF 2021 BOARD OF EQUALIZATION & REVIEW
MEETING DATE BY TAX ADMINISTRATOR JODIE RHEA

Tax Administrator Jodie Rhea stated that after talking with the County Manager, the first meeting with the Board of Equalization and Review meeting has been scheduled for April 26, 2021. Jodie Rhea stated he has to advertise this meeting at least ten days before that date.

Chair Lee asked, “How many appeals do we have?” Jodie responded, “None.” Chair Lee advised they would convene and adjourn on that same day, April 26th, 2021 at 6:00 PM.

TGOW UPDATES BY PROJECT CONSULTANT ROBIN PAYNE
NC RESILIENT COASTAL COMMUNITIES PROGRAM GRANT AWARDED –
NEXT STEPS

Consultant Robin Payne provided updates on TGOW and discussed the NC Resilient Coastal Communities Program Grant awarded.

Commissioner Trent suggested Robin converse with the company about using a composite material to prevent rot and paint issues or other issues that would be high maintenance.

Robin Payne continued with her presentation, showing the different options of schematics.

Chair Lee asked Robin if their recommendation, was Option 1 and Robin confirmed it was. They agreed that it flowed with the property lines better and fits the space.

More discussion about the property line and the access to the beach by emergency vehicles ensued.

Chair Lee asked the Board which option was preferred and there was CONSENSUS to move forward with Option 1.

Chair Lee asked how soon the TGOW site would be ADA compliant. Robin stated that it was going to be in the Fall and a lot of that is dictated by process, government paperwork process, and the funding availability. Robin also advised that they had one more grant to apply for.

Chair Lee stated that she and Robin plan to attend a meeting tomorrow with Dominion for another grant opportunity at the TGOW site at 9:00 AM. Chair Lee invited the Commissioners to join them and stated this could be a multi-year grant opportunity.

BOARD OF ELECTIONS VOTING EQUIPMENT UPDATE BY BOARD OF
ELECTIONS DIRECTOR SHEILA HOLLOMAN

Board of Elections Director Sheila Holloman greeted the Board of Commissioners and recognized several members of the Board of Elections who joined her at the meeting: Board Chair William Michael Freeman, Board Secretary Rev. Anthony Ward, and Board Member Michael Fields.

Director Holloman stated the Elections equipment has reached the end of its life. Sheila stated the current equipment was purchased in 2006 with HAVA Grant funds. Director Holloman advised that because of the pandemic, they have been awarded another HAVA Grant to purchase new equipment. She stated that they used a portion of that grant to install security cameras in their building and they have approximately \$40,000 left to purchase equipment. Director Holloman informed the Board that in their packets they have a quote from ES&S, which is the preferred vendor.

County Manager Vaughan informed the Commissioners that on the right side of their packets is a letter from the state Executive Director Board of Elections. The second page shows the total

amount of the grant, and the last two pages are the quote for the equipment and software that Director Holloman mentioned.

Chair Lee asked Director Holloman if there was a mandate to replace the equipment by a certain time. Director Holloman stated that there is currently no requirement to replace the equipment; however, they are beginning to have problems with the equipment, batteries, and the chips that are used to store data.

Commissioner Roberson asked if it was the consensus of the Board to purchase the equipment and the Board confirmed a CONSENSUS.

Chair Lee asked the Finance Director and County Manager to research and recommend the best payment arrangement at the next regular meeting on April 26,2021.

DISASTER RECOVERY UPDATE ON DISPLACED FAMILIES

County Manager Vaughan provided an update on the disaster recovery. County Manager Vaughan stated there are thirteen families residing in trailer campers located; some are located on property owned by citizens residing in them and some on properties the County is renting. The two families who had extended stay at the hotel are no longer there. Three families have moved out of the trailer campers.

County Manager Vaughan stated that DSS is doing a great job with case management and speaking with these residents and working with CADA to provide more permanent housing options. He stated that a number of these residents have gotten vouchers from CADA.

County Manager Vaughan stated he plans to continue working closely with DSS and being informed of the housing options being offered to these citizens.

County Manager Vaughan advised that the contract stated the length of the contracts for citizens in trailer campers is for six months to a year with an option to renew for an additional six months. It further states that it is temporary housing and if other options become available, those options should be chosen. County Manager Vaughan stated the trailer campers are not meant to be long term housing.

Commissioner Roberson stated that a lot of people may not be willing to leave their community.

Commissioner Roberson asked County Manager Vaughan if he would converse with DSS about educating our citizens and inform them that they may to leave their community so that they can have more permanent housing.

Chair Lee stated that August is the year mark.

County Manager Vaughan advised that the tornado took place in August but the citizens were not in the campers until October. So, they are just at the six-month mark right now.

County Manager Vaughan asked if the Board has ever voted on waiving inspection fees for citizens who have damaged or destroyed properties when natural disasters occur. If houses had to be worked on the inspection fees would be waived so the tenants did not have to pay for them.

Chair Lee stated that she didn't recall that.

Commissioner Trent stated that it sounded familiar to him. He advised that he didn't remember when, but if any house was destroyed by some type of disaster we would waive those fees as far as rebuilding when it comes to receiving inspection.

Chair Lee asked if that happened after Hurricane Matthew and Commissioner Trent stated he thought so.

Commissioner Trent made a **MOTION** for permit fees to be **WAIVED** for citizens who experience disasters of any sort and homes are destroyed. Commissioner Roberson **SECONDED** the **MOTION**. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **4-0** vote.

Commissioner Roberson stated he will volunteer his time to assist DSS with making sure these people get relocated into a home.

WATER RATE DISCUSSION

County Manager Vaughan presented the Board with a spreadsheet that calculated potential revenues with various water rates based on the average use of water.

Chair Lee stated to the citizens, the reason they are considering the rate increase is because the water department is losing money.

A discussion was then held by the Board and County Manager Vaughan about the consideration of increasing the water rates.

The Board, County Manager and the Finance Director also discussed the need to move forward with the Lewiston project as soon as funds allow.

OTHER ITEMS AS NEEDED

Chair Lee stated since they were ahead of schedule we were going to move down to the bottom of the agenda.

Chair Lee stated that this past week, she inquired about the use of the multipurpose room at the Cooperative Extension Library building. Chair Lee stated that the County Manager had provided the policy for the use of the room they sit in today, the Senior Center, as a guide. Chair Lee stated that County Manager Vaughan will lead this discussion.

County Manager Vaughan advised the Commissioners that the last handout on the right side of their packet is The Bertie County Senior Center Use Policy.

A brief discussion about allowable uses of the new multipurpose room at the new Cooperative Extension was held by the Board and the County Manager.

Commissioner Trent stated that no one should be allowed to use the kitchen to cook because it could cause a fire.

Finance Director William Roberson suggested not using it for anything but meetings and then revisit this conversation in a year.

Commissioner Roberson stated that he believed the building was designed for meeting and special conferences and not for cooking.

Commissioner Trent stated that the room should be used for meeting and special conferences only and not for banquets or anything like that.

Chair Lee stated that they certainly could follow those guidelines for this first year.

A consensus was made by the Board that the room would be just used for meetings and conferences hosted by Bertie County agencies, educational institutions, Vidant Hospital, or state agencies.

Commissioner Trent suggested that if anyone else would like to request use, they can come before the County Commissioners for review.

Chair Lee stated to also add the no smoking, no alcohol, no weapons because it is the County's property.

County Manager Vaughan stated the other item that he would like to bring before the Board, is the next regularly scheduled meeting is April 26th, 2021 and there is another regular scheduled meeting for May 3, 2021, which is one week later. County Manager Vaughan stated that it would be great if we could add another week between meetings instead of having two meetings a week apart. He recommended cancelling the May 3rd meeting or amending the schedule to have a meeting on May 10th, 2021 instead of May 3rd, 2021 in the Commissioners Room at 6:00 PM if their schedules permit.

A **MOTION** was made to amend the schedule from May 3rd, 2021 at 6:00 PM to May 10th, 2021 to 6:00 PM by Commissioner Trent. The **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Atkins. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **4-0** vote.

WATER RATE DISCUSSION CONTINUED

Chair Lee stated we are now being joined by the Water Superintendent Ricky Spivey. Chair Lee stated that she believed that they had finished that discussion. Chair Lee informed Superintendent Spivey that the Board asked County Manager Vaughan and Finance Director Mr. William to give them the amount or percentage increase after the last water increase.

Superintendent Spivey stated that the last increase was 2016.

Commissioner Trent stated that they needed to make sure before they enacted anything, we should make sure their percentages are not too high because then they would not qualify for some federal grants.

Chair Lee stated they don't want to price themselves out of grant opportunities.

County Manager Vaughan stated he and staff would meet and follow up with the Board regarding the rates of increase and the amount of revenue projected based on new rates.

Commissioner Trent requested to attend the meeting with County Manager Vaughan and staff to discuss rates of increase and projected revenues.

2020 AUDIT UPDATE & BUDGET DISCUSSION

-FIRE DEPARTMENTS' BUDGET UPDATE

FIRE STUDY: NEXT STEPS

County Manager Vaughan distributed a packet of budgets received from 10 of 12 fire departments in the county.

County Manager Vaughan stated that he did not receive budgets Aulander and Askewville fire departments. County Manager Vaughan stated the budgets are arranged in alphabetical order starting with Blue Jay ending with Windsor.

The Board took a few moments to review the budgets.

Finance Director William asked was there a reason those two departments had not submitted anything.

Chair Lee asked County Manager Vaughan if he knew what the request was for this budget year.

County Manager Vaughan stated the request they received from the Bertie County Fire Association was to increase the current contribution of \$30,000 to each fire department to \$50,000 plus \$500 per call.

Chair Lee stated that many of the fire departments have money in the bank but with the price of equipment, it will not take long for them to go through that money.

Commissioner Trent asked when was the last time they gave them an increase.

Chair Lee stated that it was three years ago.

Chair Lee stated they got a \$10,000 increase; it went from \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Chair Lee stated that personally she thinks \$500 a call is a bit too much.

County Manager brought to the Boards attention that the Fire study does mention options of establishing rural fire protection districts and establishing a single county fire and rescue district.

County Manager Vaughan stated if the Board is interested, we can invite them to a meeting to further explain those options.

In response to previous inquiries from the Board regarding the audit, County Manager Vaughan stated the auditor sent him a very rough draft yesterday evening around 6:00 PM and plans to send a more updated draft in two weeks, which will be before our next work session.

County Manager stated that after a quick review, he and William noted several things that need to be brought to the auditor's attention.

County Manager Vaughan stated that William predicted that we ended fiscal year 2020 with a deficit of approximately \$500,000. County Manager Vaughan stated that William's prediction fell just a bit short and it looks like there is a deficit of approximately \$750,000.

Finance Director Roberson stated that he did want to follow up on that. He stated it looked like the auditors reduced the accounts receivable from previous years for EMS and he thinks they took a little bit more off than he anticipated. Finance Director Roberson stated that he has to find out where they got their numbers from and that figure of \$750,000 could possibly come down a little bit.

County Manager stated the audit is showing that our final fund balance appropriation is \$1.9 Million. He stated that he and William have been looking at the budget and past budgets and for the past few years, there has been quite a bit of fund balance appropriated just to balance the budget. County Manager Vaughan stated that it's just no way we can continue doing this without depleting fund balance.

Chair Lee stated we didn't last year.

County Manager Vaughan stated that he wasn't referring to the year, but prior years.

County Manager Vaughan stated the American Rescue Plan looks like it's going to be a great resource.

County Manager stated that we just have to acknowledge that any time we increase our expenses, we also have to balance that out with identifying another source of revenue.

Commissioner Trent reminded everyone about the number of natural disasters we had and the money used for them were pulled out of the fund balance, some of which has still not been reimbursed. Chair Lee stated that they had some projects that they didn't have a choice like the courthouse.

Finance Director William Roberson stated that he will go on record to say, based on their attempt to do a budget this year with no fund balance, if their trend holds true, we should definitely look a lot better at the end of 2021 than we have looked in the last several years.

Commissioner Roberson stated to Chair Lee that employees have told him they hadn't gotten a raise in two years.

Chair Lee advised Commissioner Roberson that they didn't get one last year. It's the first year they didn't get one.

Commissioner Roberson stated that he would hope at some point they provide an increase for employees.

Chair Lee stated that she agreed, but they can't have the LGC and others from Raleigh looking at them because of their fund balance and not being fiscally responsible.

County Manager Vaughan stated that they were going to get back with the auditor as soon as possible to talk about a few things that they noticed and as soon as they get a better draft they will have a discussion.

Chair Lee stated that she wanted the auditors in Bertie County in August preparing their next year's audit.

County Manger Vaughan stated that he had also made it clear that the he and the Board wanted to see a final audit as soon as possible in order to plan appropriately for the upcoming year.

**HOME CONSORTIUM PROGRAM PRESENTATION BY MERRILL FLOOD, ECU,
DIRECTOR OF LOCAL COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**

Mr. Merrill Flood provided a brief introduction of himself and began a presentation via Zoom.

Mr. Flood stated the State Employees Credit Union Foundation asked ECU to help with the challenge of affordable housing in Northeast North Carolina.

Mr. Flood stated that they begin a process with County Mangers back in November. A meeting was held with members of Bertie, Halifax, Hertford, North Hampton and Martin County to discuss how to increase the availability and funding for affordable housing in this five-county region.

Mr. Flood stated that through this conversation, the idea of a Home Consortium Program was generated.

Commissioner Trent asked Mr. Flood if this program provides financing for developers to build homes. Mr. Flood stated that was possible.

Mr. Flood stated that the Home Consortium Program bases eligibility on the Hud formula. He also stated that the five counties would be eligible for \$657,000 annually. This money would be divided amongst the five counties.

Mr. Flood stated that if they wanted to do this, they must have all five counties to participate.

Chair Lee asked Mr. Flood how the money is divided.

Mr. Flood stated that how the money is divided will be decided among the five counties.

Chair Lee asked if they could bank the money and draw double next year.

Mr. Flood stated in a sense you have to spend the money because HUD will only allocate no more than one and half times your grant amount in the Treasury. You can bank it in your consortium, but not it in the Treasury.

Mr. Flood stated that you can do housing rehabilitation is also an option with the funds.

RECESS

Chair Lee called for a recess and advised that they would come back at 12:00 PM.

LIBRARY/NC COOPERATIVE EXTENSION FACILITY UPDATE BY PROJECT ARCHITECTS AMBER IDOL & DANI HOFF

Ms. Amber Idol provided an update and began by stating that everything very close to completion. Amber stated the parking lot was the biggest milestone that happened last week. She stated the only thing that hadn't been completed was the signage and that should be complete very soon as well as the pond fence.

Amber stated that there were a few things delayed; the main thing on the inside was the fire extinguisher cabinets. She advised that they've hung the extinguishers, but the cabinets are just on back order and that should be in soon. She stated that shouldn't hold anything up with the building inspection. The window boxes were scheduled to be finished today.

She stated the building inspector was there on Monday. He provided a list of things he wanted to see completed before he would grant a certificate of occupancy. Amber stated that the inspector was suppose to be back on Friday and will hopefully grant the certificate of occupancy.

Amber stated that this coming Monday, if everything goes as planned, they will be back onsite to assess masonry and the outside of the building. Move-in should be possible within the next couple of weeks.

Chair Lee asked if we still have a year for repairs after taking possession of this building,

Dani stated confirmed those repairs would be considered warranty items and from the final completion date you have twelve months for anything that breaks, wears unusually fast, or has malfunctions. She advised the County to call the contractor if this happens and they will come out and fix it. At the eleventh month mark, they will come back with the contractor and complete another punch list to catch anything that needs to be fixed before the warranty expires.

Dani stated that through the life of the building, if you see something not looking right, give them a call and they will come back out and take a look at the building. Doing so will help address any issues that might come up at any time.

OTHER ITEMS

Chair Lee stated that the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Annual Conference is August 12-14th and if Commissioners would like to attend, please let Ms. Cartwright know so she can make the arrangements.

Chair Lee asked the Board to come dressed to take a picture on the April 26th if Commissioner Wesson is able be with them.

A **MOTION** to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Trent and the **MOTION** was **SECONDED** by Commissioner Roberson. The **MOTION PASSED** with a **4-0** vote.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Lee adjourned the meeting.