

**PITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA  
MAY 19, 1999**

The Pitt County Board of Commissioners met in a workshop session meeting on Wednesday, May 19, 1999, at 8:30 a.m. in the Emergency Operations Center conference room, Pitt County Office Building, Greenville, North Carolina with the following commissioners present:

Eugene James, Chairman  
Glenn Bowen, Commissioner  
Charles P. Gaskins, Commissioner  
David Hammond, Commissioner  
Thomas H. Johnson, Commissioner  
Mark W. Owens, Jr., Commissioner  
M. Theresa Shank, Commissioner  
Beth B. Ward, Commissioner

Absent:

Jeffrey E. Savage, Vice Chairman

Also present were:

Thomas B. Robinson, County Manager  
JoAnne Burgdorff, County Attorney  
Susan J. Banks, Clerk to the Board  
Arlen Holt, PIO and Cable Coordinator  
John K. Bulow, Assistant Manager  
Melonie Bryan, Director of Financial Services

**Call to Order** and welcome by Chairman James.

The Invocation was given by Commissioner Owens.  
The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Shank.

Chairman James called for approval of the agenda.

**UPON MOTION** by Commissioner Bowen, seconded by Commissioner Hammond, the Board voted unanimously to approve the agenda.

**Manager's Overview**

Mr. Robinson noted that the Mental Health and Health Department were delayed in getting their budgets to the Finance Office, so their budgets may need some additional work.

It was suggested that there be some discussion time planned during these workshops. Commissioner Owens stated that there may need to be some additional time for adoption of the budget. Commissioner Ward said the Manager knows that he is not supposed to raise taxes and that discussion immediately following the presentations is important.

Mr. Robinson said he was trying to adhere to a 3.5% increase in revenues annually. He stated that \$848 was the benchmark for all 100 counties for per pupil allocation but \$957 is the new benchmark.

Commissioner Shank provided current figures from the School Board's information noting that the figure were not consistent with the Manager's sources. She stated that the School Board reports for 1997-1998 was \$987.86 per pupil for Pitt County and the State information said \$1087 per pupil. She said that Pitt County would be in the top 25% if they upped the per pupil allocation. The Board discussed having a functional line item budget for the schools.

Commissioner Owens said he wanted Pitt County Schools to be number one in the State for education. Commissioner Ward said that there is not necessarily a correlation between funding and test scores and that increasing the money does not always equal accountability. Commissioner Ward said that Pitt County loses teachers because the School system offers their contracts late in the year so the teachers go to the counties that make the earlier offers.

Mr. Robinson discussed unmet needs which were a concern of commissioners at the May 18<sup>th</sup> workshop on the capital needs for schools. Commissioner Shank asked the Chairman to work with the Manager to schedule a future meeting to work on the capital improvement program for the schools.

### **Mental Health - Darlene Hunnicutt**

Ms. Hunnicutt shared an overview of the Mental Health Center reorganization for efficiency. She said their previous budget was overstated and they have tried to make a realistic budget for next year. The budget was decreased by approximately 12% or \$2 million. She said that they have received some additional revenues which have been added.

Ms. Hunnicutt said that she separated out and set aside restrictive funds and administrative costs so they will no longer be co-mingled. She stated that administrative cost for Thomas S and Willie M programs have been prorated and some allowances have been made. Ms. Hunnicutt said that some of the staff must maintain licensing and the Center will provide some in-house training so they can maintain their credentials. The 3% cost of living increase was included per instructions from the Manager. They have provided for medical insurance increase in the amount of \$77,000. She stated that they have used up all of their contingency fund so they no longer have funds for emergencies. They are asking for a 3% increase in County appropriation. She stated that in this budget they are \$39,000 short and that the Manager recommended use of lapsed salary funds.

Ms. Hunnicutt said that she feels good about this budget. She said it is realistic and has been validated by consultants. She said at this time she is not aware of any additional funds from the Legislature. There are 208 full time employees. Some employees are going to be reclassified, which is included in the budget. Commissioner Gaskins asked if they plan to let the Board of Commissioners know about any future cuts in funding. Ms. Hunnicutt stated they will inform the Board. Commissioner Shank pointed out that Ms. Stelle, who is leaving June 30 , salary has been budgeted so those lapsed salary funds could be used to balance the budget.

Commissioner Shank asked how many people were rehired from the reduction in force. Ms. Hunnicutt estimated that 24 people were rehired of the 60 positions which were reduced. The Board asked Ms. Hunnicutt to provide the Board with a report on the number of individuals that were released under the reduction-in-force policy from Mental and hired back individuals as well as those that applied and did not get rehired.

Dr. Burwell stated she would provide a copy of the timeline for hiring of the Area Director and reported on the search committee's progress. She said that the advertisement should be done around the first of June.

Commissioner Ward stated that the Area Director must be an Administrative/Human Services person. The Board asked that Florida Hardy, County Personnel Director, be added to the search committee. Chairman James stated that he would like to have a county commissioner added to the search committee for the Area Director. Dr. Burwell stated that they are working on as quick a turnaround as possible, but not willing to sacrifice the program by not getting the best qualified applicant. She was agreeable that a county commissioner be added to the search committee.

Mr. Robinson stated that he gave the Mental Health Center authority to use lapsed salaries. He said their turnover rate is high, around 5 -10%, and they can use lapsed salaries to balance their budget with his support. He said that while there is a 3% increase in their budget, there are other costs to be incurred.

Mr. Robinson stated that the County budget will suffer because of the unemployment claims from the reduction in force and the court costs for the appeal process by employees. Commissioner Shank suggested a closed session be held later with the County Attorney reporting on personnel cases from Mental Health. Commissioner Owens asked if the State would pick up some of these budget shortfalls including court cases since they are considered State employees.

Chairman James stated he appreciated what they were doing at Mental Health. Dr. Burwell asked Chairman James to come to their next board meeting and express his appreciation as he had just stated, and he agreed.

Chairman James called for a break.

### **Board of Elections - Margaret Hardee**

Others present were: Jim Young, Ernest Hasilrig, Ray Holloman, and Patrick Nelson.

Mr. Robinson stated that the Board of Elections sent in a revised budget which increased their budget significantly. Ms. Hardee stated that they look at precincts every ten years. They have done the research and got further projections, so they had to realign the budget with the new projections. She said that their Board knew that they needed more divisions. She said that they did the study and were way over the State maximum in some of the voting poles. She explained how they draw the voting districts.

Ms. Hardee stated that the new districts needed would almost double the number of precincts and presented the Board with an estimated cost. She said that they have to consider parking and voter confusion as well as need to add more poll workers. Some of the poll workers can be reallocated while they are trying to be economical, yet working to benefit the voters. Ms. Hardee said they discussed permanent part-time workers and noted that the County has a lot of money invested in training poll workers.

Ms. Hardee stated that the Legislative Services, U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Census Bureau have to approve changes in precincts. It was stated that the Bethel precinct people complain that there are workers sitting around doing nothing. Ms. Hardee said that the voters come at peak times and you still have to have proper coverage. Mr. Robinson said that the approved budget was for \$398,000 but her request was for over \$800,000, which was a 10% increase over this current year.

Mr. Robinson asked Ms. Hardee to address the large capital outlay request. She stated that they wanted it in the record that their research shows the need for additional voting machines so they requested 39 new machines with two for absentee ballots. She said they absolutely have to have two machines and the others will supplement precincts. Chairman James expressed appreciation to the Board of Elections and then recognized the members to address the Board. Each member expressed their support for Ms. Hardee's request for an increase in the Board of Elections budget.

### **Council on Aging - Doug Jackson, Chairman of Finance Committee**

Mr. Jackson stated that they were asking for \$65,265 expansion budget which covers raises for staff, half time social worker and other items for a total increase of \$201,765 from the County. Commissioner Shank stated that there is a great need in this area and that their offices

are very crowded. Dr. Charles Byrd, Council on Aging Director addressed a question about other funding and said that they receive State funding, grants and other donations.

Mr. Robinson stated that they do need a new home for their program, a new Senior Center. He said the County does not have to do that now but they will need a decision from this Board for the County to assist them financially. Ms. Frances Mewborn, Council on Aging board member, stated that the senior citizens are an asset not a liability.

Dr. Byrd provided a copy of their client waiting list and stated their need for a full time social worker in order to do assessment. Even with 200+ volunteers there are still additional needs for staff. He said there is a definite need to increase beyond what Mr. Robinson has put in their budget.

Chairman James expressed appreciation for the Council on Aging and what they do for the community.

### **Pitt-Greenville Airport - Jim Turcotte**

Mr. Turcotte reported that they have requested \$75,000 from each the City of Greenville and the County for capital improvement. He said the Manager recommended in the budget \$50,000. Mr. Turcotte then gave a historical review and noted that the Airport is in their 14<sup>th</sup> year of being self supported. He expressed that the Airport is a vital force for economic improvements. Mr. Turcotte stated that this fits in with the plans for orderly development around the Airport. He said that upcoming challenges come up next year with US Airways purchased. Mr. Turcotte stated that in the partnership between the City of Greenville and Pitt County, they have approved \$50,000 and usually the County does the same.

They discussed the changes around the Airport in connection with the realignment of Highway 33.

### **Pitt County Schools - Aaron Beaulieu, Finance Officer**

Mr. Ephraigm Smith, Board of Education member, said that they are appealing their budget because they asked for \$3.0 Million and the County Manager only recommended a little over \$1.0 million. He stated that the school population is increasing by 200-250 students each year and they need to look at the direct cost of needs for next year. He reported that there is \$2.0 million in the Schools fund balance which is for emergency situations. Mr. Smith said that the new trends are towards more accountability in the system and students and the teachers are under more pressure. Mr. Smith insisted that it takes money to raise test scores and that Pitt County is about state average. He stated that there are students that need remedial work and they need a commitment from the Board of Commissioners to move forward with adding this help but it will take money. He introduced the Board of Education members that were present.

Mr. Aaron Beaulieu said there is a shortfall in meeting the Schools needs in their request. Mr. Beaulieu said that there is a direct correlation that money does make a difference in education and that it is significant that North Carolina ranks 40<sup>th</sup> in the State in Teachers supplements. He stated that their request was the bare minimum.

Mr. Beaulieu said that County funds are 17% of the Schools' budget and the local dollars are the only ones where they have much flexibility. He stated that he knew that there is a discrepancy in figures used for per pupil cost and allocation. He stated that they used the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. He also stated that they increased their fund balance from \$600,000 to \$2.0 million. He also noted that if the commissioners chose to do functional funding, they need to understand the State requirements for budget.

Mr. Beaulieu stated that the budget request summary was over 300 pages because they tried to provide as much detail as any system in the State and that all the line item expenditures are shown.

Commissioner Ward asked about the federal government funding, free and reduced lunches and how much they were receiving from Title 1 funding. Mr. Beaulieu said that the Pitt County's Schools share is about \$3.5 million. Commissioner Ward said that she had received mailings concerning hiring of teachers and asked what they were doing for recruiting and the schedule for hiring new candidates.

Dr. Sosne said he would be glad to have staff from Human Resources address that question later.

Commissioner Ward asked if there has there been a comparison of teachers' supplements and was there any correlation to accountability and test scores. Commissioner Ward asked who has the bottom line responsibility to move money for the schools. Mr. Beaulieu said the Board of Education has to approve the amendments. Commissioner Ward said that the Board has requested the in-kind support which the County provides for the Schools such as offices, payment of utilities, expenses, and inspection of facilities. The Board discussed the Schools \$2.0 million fund balance. Mr. Beaulieu said that the Local Government Commission has recommended a 2% for school boards in the past but have moved away from dictating a percentage and is no longer making a recommendation.

Commissioners asked about housing of school offices, low wealth funding and teacher supplements. It was noted that \$44,000 was going towards principals and assistant principals supplements and the teachers' supplements were \$590,000 plus 18% for benefits. Commissioner Shank asked if the State raises were mandatory and the response was that they are mandatory for County and State. The Board discussed the per pupil allocation and the schools use \$899 per pupil expenditure, without child nutrition included. Commissioner Shank said the 1997-1998 information from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners uses \$876 and \$848. She expressed that the two systems, Schools and County Government, need to get together and use the same figure.

Commissioner Bowen said the figures were misleading and that he had received phone calls about increasing the teachers supplement. He stated that the figures were separated with non teachers and teachers as well as other personnel. Commissioner Bowen asked the schools need for a fund balance and if there was any way for the County to appropriate money for teachers supplement without it being used for something else. Mr. Beaulieu stated that the Board of Commissioners could appropriate funds by purpose or function code.

Commissioner Owens asked about the percentage increase the teachers will received from the State or Federal governments. Dr. Sosne stated that the Federal money is totally unpredictable and that they were trying to work with three budgets. Commissioner Owens asked if there could be an agreement between the School Board to only spend the money appropriated on the teachers supplements and instructed Dr. Sosne to ask the Board of Education and return to the Board of Commissioners with their response.

Commissioner Hammond asked how many teachers may be lost this year. Mr. Beaulieu said they are asking for additional 17 new positions.

Commissioners discussed social promotions and other counties supplements. Commissioner Ward stated that she felt the need should be to tend to the classroom teachers because they can make a difference. They also discussed the funding of special education classes and noted that there are 24.5 exceptional program teachers in Pitt County

Commissioner Bowen said he had talked with many teachers and that they had not left because of the money issue.

Sidney Scott, Chairman of the Board of Education spoke on behalf of the additional funding for teachers supplements and other items.

Commissioner Ward asked about the contract schedule for hiring teachers because there was some concern that Pitt County loses teachers because other counties offer positions earlier in the process. Pitt County Schools have hired 12 teachers for the next year at this time. She also noted that in many communities the first, second, and third year teachers are getting hirer supplements to stay with the system.

Chairman James thanked the School Board members and staff for their presentation.

### **Engineering/Inspections - Phil Dickerson**

Mr. Dickerson stated that he had heard from several board members that there are not enough staff in Inspections to answer the phones and public questions. He stated that the County can raise the fees for inspections which will generate funds for another position. He said that they could charge the schools for inspections because there is currently a lost of \$30,000 in revenue for inspections of schools.

Chairman James thanked Phil Dickerson for his work.

Commissioner Ward said she wants a line item/functional budget for the schools so that before they can transfer from one of those specific categories they have to come back to the Board of Commissioners.

Mr. Robinson said that if the Board makes that type of budget, then they will need to study their budget more thoroughly during budget deliberations.

**UPON MOTION** by Commissioner Hammond, seconded by Commissioner Shank, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan J. Banks, CMC  
Clerk to the Board