

PITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA
MAY 23, 2002 MINUTES

The Pitt County Board of Commissioners met on Thursday, May 23, 2002, at 8:30 AM in the Commissioners' Auditorium, Pitt County Office Building, 1717 W. 5th Street, Greenville, North Carolina.

Commissioners present:

Mark Owens, Jr., Chairman
Beth Ward, Vice Chairwoman
David Hammond, Commissioner
Eugene James, Commissioner
Tom Coulson, Commissioner
Randy Royal, Commissioner
Terry Shank, Commissioner (arrived later)
Tom Johnson, Commissioner

Commissioners Absent:

Glenn Bowen, Commissioner

Staff present:

Scott Elliott, County Manager
JoAnne Burgdorff, County Attorney
Melonie Bryan, Director of Financial Services
Phil Dickerson, Director of Facility Services
Deby Dihoff, Mental Health Area Director
Susan J. Banks, Clerk to the Board
Loretta Lewellyn, Budget Administrator
John K. Bulow, Assistant County Manager

Call to Order

Chairman Owens called the meeting to order. He informed the Board and public that following Commissioner Bowen leaving the Board meeting yesterday he was admitted to the hospital. He said he talked with Commissioner Bowen and understands he will be released this afternoon.

Invocation and Pledge

The invocation was offered by Commissioner Hammond.
The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Coulson.

Approval of Agenda

Motion:

Approve agenda as submitted.

Motion made by Commissioner Eugene James.

Motion seconded by Commissioner Randy Royal.

Motion Passed Unanimously.

Mr. Elliott stated that he had no comments and Mr. Joyner could begin his presentation.

Items for Discussion

Emergency Services - Fire & EMS, Communications System - Bobby Joyner, John Bulow, JoAnne Burgdorff

Meeting Notes

Fire Departments - Bobby Joyner

Mr. Joyner said that Bell Arthur, Black Jack, Gardnerville and Staton House Fire Departments are asking for an increase in their budgets for this year. The Advisory Committee made the recommendation.

EMS Service – Bobby Joyner, Helen Reel

Mr. Joyner said the EMS Advisory Committee has worked hard on this recommendation. Two letters were presented to the Board and Mr. Joyner introduced Ms. Helen Reel, Chairman of EMS Advisory Committee.

Mr. Joyner submitted the following two letters for the record:

***Emergency Medical Services Advisory Commission
1717 W 5th Street
Greenville, North Carolina 27834
(252) 830-6345***

May 22, 2002

Mr. Scott Elliott, County Manager
1717 W 5th Street
Greenville, NC 27834

Dear Mr. Elliott:

During the May 9, 2002, meeting of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Advisory Commission, you met with us and asked our opinion on a request that the County not charge volunteer firefighters and EMS personnel for the use of EMS services. After discussion among the Commission, there was a motion made by Ann Huggins that all EMS service calls be billed with no exceptions, Charles Mayo seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The EMS Advisory Commission is not in favor of excluding anyone from the EMS fee for service.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Helen Reel
Chairman

**Emergency Medical Services Advisory Commission
1717 W 5th Street
Greenville, North Carolina 27834
(252) 830-6345**

May 22, 2002

Mr. Scott Elliott, County Manager
1717 W 5th Street
Greenville, NC 27834

Dear Mr. Elliott:

At the May 21, 2002, meeting of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Advisory Commission the funding of EMS for the 2002-2003 year was discussed.

The EMS Advisory Commission is asking that the County Commissioners set an EMS tax of three-cent and continue billing for EMS services at \$400.00 per call. It is anticipated this will generate \$1,856,256.00. The EMS Advisory Commission is recommending the County fund the EMS at \$2,112,597.00. This will be a \$256,341.00 short fall. This recommendation was presented to the County Commissioners on February 25, 2002. A motion was made by Glenn Bowen to accept the recommendation for a three-cent tax rate for emergency rescue services and the remaining \$250,000.00 deficit will be funded from the County's fund balance. Terry Shank seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The EMS Advisory Commission has looked at the funding and know that there are several squads that will not have enough money to operate the entire 2002-2003 budget year. Those squads affected will be coming to the EMS Advisory Commission and asking them to ask the County Commissioners for additional funds. The EMS Advisory Commission wants the County Commissioners to be aware that they will be asking for additional funds in the middle of the 2002-2003 budget year.

The EMS Advisory Commission has spent many hours studying EMS in the County and are well aware that there is no easy solution and no solution will make everyone happy. It is our goal to provide the same level of service in a timely manner to all areas of the County.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,
Helen Reel
Chairman

Ms. Reel said that she knew that some rescue squads wanted to be exempt from the \$400 call fee but the Advisory Committee recommends that no squad be exempt from the fee. The EMS Advisory Commission is asking that the County Commissioners set an EMS tax of three-cent and continue billing for EMS services at \$400.00 per call.

These funds will not cover all of the expenses for the rescue squad services for the whole county. Personnel budgets will not be met with this budget. She assured the Board that they would be back in front of the Board requesting additional funding for next fiscal year if this is all the funding that they receive. The State mandates that the County provides this service. There are a lot of volunteers that are willing to man the trucks but it takes money to provide those services. Some squads would like to keep their taxes in their area but this will not help the whole system.

Commissioner Johnson asked if the committee considered the municipalities cutting their support. Ms. Reel said that the municipalities were originally making contributions to EMS. She stated that her squad is in the Town of Farmville and the Town will just provide the three cents tax. The Town of Farmville legally broke their contract and said they were not going to give them the \$30,000. They said if they get in a bind, they will provide assistance. Commissioner Johnson said he is concerned about the county taking over the rescue services but the towns pulling out their assistance. Commissioner Johnson said this Board may need to meet with the towns. Ms. Reel said the State has mandated that the County is responsible, not the municipalities. Commissioner Hammond said it is hard to mandate volunteers to do anything. He asked what will prevent ambulance services from running rescue. Ms. Reel said the County controls that opportunity to franchise.

Commissioner James asked about Greenville serving parts of Pitt County. He said all the tax money in that area will not go to Greenville. He said the people in Farmville will benefit the most. Commissioner James asked if a lawsuit comes, what defense does the County have against it. He said they will probably support the tax but there are still a lot of questions about this change. Commissioner James asked for the number of citizens that Greenville serves outside the city limits. There is a contract between the County and Greenville to provide services outside of the city limits.

Vice Chairwoman Ward asked what the State deadline is for meeting this mandates. Ms. Reel said January 1, 2003. She said she is not sure how strict they will be on compliance and it does not set any criteria for the services. She asked if the municipalities are going to support their squads. Vice Chairwoman Ward said the County never said that there would be no need for assistance from the municipalities.

Commissioner Shank arrived at this time.

Ms. Reel said they have run a squad with paid people and volunteers. There is no problem between the paid and volunteer staff. Vice Chairwoman Ward said the Board was not thinking that the municipalities would not support their squads. Ms. Reel said if this Board would talk with the Mayors and request their support that would be excellent.

Vice Chairwoman Ward asked how the money would be disbursed from the tax. She said there was a formula that would be considered for use to determine distribution of the tax. She said she understands now that each squad submits a budget and the Advisory committee reviews budgets and make recommendations. Ms. Reel said each squad sat before the committee and discussed their budgets. She spoke about the cost of equipment. She said they looked at all the requests and tried to figure the best way to spend the money and provide the services.

Commissioner Johnson asked about Bethel EMS. Ms. Reel said this was a subcontract under the Bethel EMS. Commissioner James said the Mayor of Bethel said if they could get the 3 cents tax, they would be fine. He said they intend to give their citizens the best service and they will have to continue to help with assistance. Commissioner Johnson said these services are not equal. He said its not fair for the towns to drop their funding and then you have Eastern Pines and Pactolus who do not have town funding. Ms. Reel said they understood in the past that the towns were going to continue to fund their squads until July 1 when they could get things ironed out. She said they have no control over the towns. Ms. Reel said they would like to provide paramedic service to everyone but that may not be their first responder. Commissioner Johnson spoke about paramedics. Ms. Reel said everyone is screaming for paramedics and some squads have certain criteria to be met prior to letting them out.

Bobby Joyner said he met with every municipality and with their consent this board could adopt the three-cent tax and they would not have to take funds out of their budgets. That is why they each agreed to adopt the resolution of support for the 3 cents tax. Commissioner Hammond said he talked to a private ambulance service who said they could provide the service with \$300 per call. The Captains of the Rescue Squads who petition the State for mandating a service without any funds. Eastern Pines does not have the same support as those in the municipalities. Ms. Reel said the \$400 fee was set by the Board of Commissioners not the Advisory Committee. Commissioner Coulson said the municipalities should not have to pay additionally because this would double taxing the citizens. Commissioner Royal asked if the Board should not have communicated that the implementation of the 3-cent tax did not mean that they could drop their support. This should be done by the Board of Commissioners. He said as a Board that this may need to be straightened out. Commissioner Johnson said that Bethel may not get the full three cents, they may get less.

Commissioner Johnson said Eastern Pines was told to use their \$150,000 and that was not fair. Ms. Reel said in Farmville if they had not had some savings in the bank they would not be able to pay their bills.

Bobby Joyner reported that on April 15 this Board decided on the \$400 call fee and formula for budgets. On February 25th this was presented to the board that there would be a shortfall in funding. Additional money would be taken out of contingency funds to fund the rescue squads next year. This is the third year in this process and it was expected that it would take three years to get through this process. The committee's goal is to provide this service on a countywide basis. Commissioner James said if the County is going to fund these departments, and you talk about moving a squad they will come up with the funding. He said some departments are not complaining. He spoke about the location of some of these squads and some departments are going to need more funding than others. Bobby Joyner said that is the budget but if the squads can not get the volunteers they will need additional funding for paid personnel. Vice Chairwoman Ward budget with 3 cents tax imposed.

Commissioner Johnson said some of these squads have been told that capital expense items such as trucks will be purchased by the County. It is not his desire to eliminate the volunteers. Mr. Joyner said the Chairman told them not to do anything to the volunteers.

Mr. Joyner said that an eleven-person committee ran this process, not staff.

Commissioner Hammond said the citizens are complaining about paying a \$400 fee per call plus a three cents tax on top of it.

Chairman Owens thanked each of the committee members for their work on this project. This is a budget matter that will be included in the budget ordinance.

Ms. Burgdorff reported on the 911 legislation stating that she has been working on it for a year and half. They were not able to come to a complete agreement so there was no joint bill that could be supported by both groups. The legislation is still in committee and will go to the General Assembly until the 2003-04 session. Commissioner Coulson asked about the connection with the telephone companies. Ms. Burgdorff said the phone companies do not want to be collecting the taxes. If they collect the fees, the fees can be collected on the phone bills instead of being put on the property owners. Commissioner Johnson said Ms. Burgdorff has done her homework so well that the committee elected her as chair of this project. Commissioner Hammond asked about a lawsuit. Ms. Burgdorff said she does not know of such a suit. Commissioner Hammond said it was reported at the district meeting. Ms. Bryan reported that this was a cost settlement on charges for rescue calls. The City of Greenville was the only one that benefited.

Commissioner Johnson said this Board needs to bring such items up to the legislators.

Capital Improvement Plan - Scott Elliott

Meeting Notes

Mr. Elliott said there are no new projects. There is \$10,414,845 appropriated for capital improvement plan. Ms. Bryan said if the Community College moves forward on using the \$8 million bonds, this would require a match from the County. The Board discussed this being a bond issue and the board should not have to raise taxes to cover this debt.

Commissioner Shank asked where the Board of Education's request for new schools is located on capital improvements. Ms. Bryan said one facility either middle or elementary school will be coming forward but they have not determined which school they will need based on the school population. Commissioner Shank said there needs to be plans from PCC, Schools and Social Services building needs to be added to the capital improvement plan. Ms. Bryan said the \$41 million, over State bond projects, from Pitt Community College has been provided. Commissioner Coulson said 300 to 350 students are being added each year. Every four years a school needs to be built. If not planned for now, at some point something will have to be done. Commissioner James said all classrooms are not full. List of schools, number of students and teachers. 50-60 teachers hired each year. Commissioner James said he will oppose ad valorem tax increases. Vice Chairwoman Ward said there is a facility report which was provided to the Board. She said it addresses the amount of space per student. Commissioner Johnson said the Board has the responsibility of providing school facilities and it will increase. Commissioner James said accountability is the issue.

Engineering, Inspections, Buildings & Grounds, Animal & Mosquito Control, Solid Waste, Garage - Phil Dickerson

Meeting Notes

Phil Dickerson discussed the following departments.

Engineering

Mr. Dickerson said nothing new has been added to his budget. He has a staff member working in revaluation and will bring him back when he is needed.

Inspections

Revenues will not meet projections so an increase of 5% in inspection fees has been proposed. Compared to other counties this increase is reasonable. Anytime from one the spot to a couple of days is the turn around on inspections. If it is ready and you request your inspection before 7:30 a.m., the inspection will be done on that day.

Buildings and Grounds

If the level of funding continues, you will start to see deterioration of facilities. With the cost increases, you will start to see the effect.

Animal and Mosquito Control

Taking over animal shelter and use animal control and mosquito control staff to run employees. There will be three employees hired.

Solid Waste

Expenditures will exceed revenues on present fee scale. Proposed increase in fees. Need to maintain fund balance.
\$62 household fee with an increase to \$65 annually
\$45 to \$46 for non-residential fees

Commissioner Hammond said fee increases are backdoor taxes.

Commissioner James said it would not be done if it was not needed. Mr. Dickerson said you have to make sure everyone pays their fair share. Commissioner Shank said the people who use these services need to pay the expenses for them and this budget has got to be balanced by this Board. She said the Board needs to be realistic. Commissioner Johnson spoke about Mr. Dickerson's efforts on the landfill and the Coastal Chemical spill.

Garage

Garage was privatized last year. Two people in department. Will have one employee next year. Expenses are decreasing by \$100,000 and hoped to do even better next year.

A short break was held at this time.

Mental Health - Deby Dihoff

Meeting Notes

Chairman Owens called the meeting back to order.

Ms. Deby Dihoff, Mental Health Director and Duane Holder, Mental Health Finance Officer, provided a report on services. They provided information on their client

base. Agency goals which they have met were submitted. She said they were not asking for an increase in their budget and hoping to get level funding this year. They did prepare the 2.5% and 5% reduction scenarios. 27% increase in contracted services with a projected 30% increase in offsetting Medicaid.

Budget Scenario "A" includes a 11% reduction in State funding expected in addition to the Manager's \$100,000 reduction. The 2.5% reduction requested by the Manager was \$39,865. They were cut last year by \$300,000. They looked at the EARTH program. It is more sensible to cut a whole program versus cutting across the whole program. By the time they cut the program, they would have cut Medicaid and it would only cut by \$10,000. This would deprive the community with a large service. She said they may need to cut across the Board in administration. Cut Management Team and merger with some area program. She said she would be happy to do this if it would save the program. She said she anticipated a cut from the State but not the \$1.0 million that they received. She said they want to do what they can but the citizens need these services. Budget Scenario "B" with 5% reduction would be \$79,730 in county appropriation and \$990 reduction from the State. This would be an 18% reduction on top of the 17% reduction last year. The impact on citizens would be on 300-400 consumers. Reductions would be in Detox beds 30%, 3,330 alcohol treatment hours, services for up to 50 developmentally delayed children and their families and elimination of some existing program and services. She said this could mean the lost of 20-30 positions, low morale for remaining staff, higher caseloads for staff and decrease in quality of services. Community impacts would be:

- higher incidents of crime leading to stress on courts and local jails
- more school suspensions and higher drop out rates
- higher unemployment rates
- increased load to other county departments (DSS, Health, etc.)

Commissioner Hammond asked how many vacant positions do they currently have. Ms. Dihoff responded that about 21 positions were vacant. Deby Dihoff said they made an approved plan with the County by repaying the \$100,000 to the County they their own decisions on staffing. She said she did not believe those positions were frozen. She said they use emergency and temporary people to maintain their staffing. Ms. Dihoff said they would have a RIF if the cuts come through. They could only identify one to one and half positions that could be eliminated. Commissioner James questioned the Detox funding and expenses. He said he had been told it had been paying its way. Ms. Dihoff said the Detox had a \$60,000 to \$80,000 deficit this year. She said that is a small amount compared to what you get back. Commissioner James asked if the other counties are billed for coming to Pitt County since it is a regional program. Ms. Dihoff said Pitt County benefits because they get priority on the beds. She said all bets should be off on agreements. They are doing better on third party billing.

Ms. Dihoff said they are doing more group therapy sessions and double booking appointments because of many no-shows.

Commissioner Johnson said they are in an impossible situation because the patients just keep returning and do not get well. Commissioner Johnson said the Board needs to know if Mental Health gets any letters about reductions in funding immediately. Commissioner Hammond asked Ms. Dihoff if the reduction-in-force of twenty to twenty-five employees would affect them being accredited. She said she did not think it would stop this accreditation.

Commissioner Shank said each department has had to reduce expenses this past year. The County has reductions from the State as well. Commissioner Shank said she does not feel comfortable with Ms. Dihoff's response that they can not cover the \$300,000 reduction as requested by the County. Ms. Dihoff said they have done far more because they have taken a 17% cut last year and this year's cut would be 18%.

Mr. Elliott said he does empathize with Mental Health. He said its ironic that the State cuts their funding to Mental Health and then expects the County to maintain it current funding level. He spoke about funding of this Mental Health program compared to other counties mental health centers. This reduction from the County should have been anticipated by Mental Health.

Commissioner Johnson said it is terrible what the State is doing to its town and cities. He said the Area Program is supposed to be supervised by the State but they did not supervise it.

Nonprofit/Affiliated Agencies - Winterville Historical & Arts Society - LaRue Evans

Meeting Notes

Ms. LaRue Evans said they acquired property four years ago and they have been working to grow the Winterville Historical and Arts Society. They are using that facility for meetings. It is time to set up the barns. The community has done a lot in cleaning up the barns. They are trying to preserve and restore the barns. She has requested \$5,000 to expedite the project. She said they cannot tear down the barns because of historical preservation laws.

Nonprofit/Affiliated Agencies - Farmville Child Development Center - Nancy Johnson

Meeting Notes

Joyce Oliver and Nancy Johnson representing the Farmville Child Development Center. Ms. Oliver thanked the Board for the \$10,000 that the Board gave them last year. The County's show of support gave them inspiration to see what they could do to keep the center open. She said they are still operating and they still need the \$10,000. She said they appreciate the \$7,500 but they still need the \$10,000. She said they are scraping the barrel and they do not have any alternatives. They are requesting an additional \$2,500. They serve 25-28 students. They serve 6 from Farmville, 6 from Greene County and 13 from Greenville and north of the river. Greene County contributes to their program. 0-3 years old funded by Mental Health and 3-5 years old are funded through schools. The 0-3 years old is where the deficit remains in funding. They are serving 13 children for 3 months with very little funding. The older children with special needs are now served in the schools. They provide early intervention services for children that has nothing to do with Social Services but they do work with Social Services if they are actively involved with the child. Medicaid is about one-third of their budget. The children go into the public school system. Of eight children graduating this year, about half of them will be going into the schools or other programs. This is a twelve-month program.

Nonprofit/Affiliated Agencies - Pitt County Council on Aging - Dr. Charles Byrd, Artis Taylor

Meeting Notes

Dr. Charlie Byrd said a few weeks ago they requested funding for a site. He thanked the Board for instructing the County Engineer for doing a site study on property on County Home Road. The proposed budget was provided. He said they provide services for 17,000 seniors but the funding is not adequate. He said the County appropriated \$135,000 for a \$1.3 million budget. They asked for a 3% increase for 19 staff members who are 15-18% behind Mental Health and Social Services staff. It is very difficult to maintain staff with these salaries. He said he requested another social worker to help with eligibility requirements. They would help with access to services for the aging. He said they need everything in this budget. Dr. Byrd said they are getting cut by the State and United Way. They are also getting cut by the towns. He said they cannot provide health insurance for four staff members. If they cannot provide the health insurance, they will have to cut staff back to part time staff. They have completed the State's Accreditation from North Carolina. He asked for the help on staff.

Dr. Byrd said the capital outlay represents a 100% increase because they had nothing in last year's budget. They need the van to help get the meals out to people. He said his goal is to get the job done. There are additional items in capital outlay. They have a referral resource which helps put people in touch with resources. He thanked the County for what the County provides for the Council on Aging.

Commissioner James said they don't serve 17,000 senior citizens. Dr. Byrd said they serve 6,000 senior citizens. Commissioner James said senior citizens get hurt the most by raising ad valorem taxes.

Commissioner Hammond offered Dr. Byrd \$100 contribution which was matched by a citizen to start a funding for the future senior citizens center. Dr. Byrd said the senior services need to grow because this is a growing population. Commissioner Johnson said he had been working with the past County Manager on a \$1 million bond for a senior center.

Nonprofit/Affiliated Agencies - Sheppard Memorial Library - Willie Nelms, Director

Meeting Notes

Mr. Willie Nelms stated that he had not originally planned to appear until after hearing Mr. Greg Needham's appearance. He said the Manager had originally budgeted the appropriate ratio of funding. If they have a reduction, they would have to reduce hours of operations in the Bethel branch and they would have to increase fees to make up for the loss. If the State withholds funds, they would have a 17% reduction plus a 14% reduction in State aid. He said he does not challenge the Manager's recommendation. Sheppard Memorial Library is the County's library and three of the members of the Board of Trustees are County appointed. Any chances should be negotiated between the County and the City. He budgeted the same amount for 2002 as 2001 which is acceptable, if not they will lose \$173,000.

Mr. Elliott asked how much the State would reduce their funding if the County reduced its funding. Mr. Nelms said it would be in proportion to what the County's reduction would be to the library, if it is an across the Board cut. The County and City must complete a form and submit it back to the State. If it is determined that the reduction in funding from the County is not an across the Board cut, the library stands to lose their complete funding allocation from the State. Vice Chairwoman Ward asked

what the minimal requirement for the County to contribute for the library to receive State aid. The State sets criteria on per capita. Two libraries in County qualify for State aid, Sheppard and Bethel libraries. Each county gets a block grant and then you get a per capita amount in a reverse situation. The poorest libraries sometime get the largest amount of funding. New facility was expanded with local funding.

Commissioners' Comments

Information Provided with the Agenda

Chairman Owens said the Commissioners need to set another date. The consensus of the Board agreed to meet on Tuesday, May 28th at 8:30 a.m. for next budget meeting.

Adjourn

Motion:

Motion to adjourn at 12:00 p.m.
Motion made by Commissioner Eugene James.
Motion seconded by Commissioner Randy Royal.
Motion Passed Unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan J. Banks, CMC
Clerk to the Board