

**PITT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
GREENVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA
AUGUST 1, 2002 MINUTES**

The Pitt County Board of Commissioners met on Thursday, August 1, 2002, at 7:00 PM 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
Tom Coulson, Commissioner
Randy Royal, Commissioner
Glenn Bowen, Commissioner
Terry Shank, Commissioner
Eugene James, Commissioner
Tom Johnson, Commissioner

Commissioners Absent:

David Hammond, Commissioner

Staff present:

Scott Elliott, County Manager
JoAnne Burgdorff, County Attorney
Susan Banks, Clerk
John Bulow, Assistant County Manager

Call to Order

Chairman Owens called the meeting to order. He stated the State has asked for a reform procedure for mental health. A public hearing is required as part of that procedure. He stated that this Board's job is to determine if the Pitt County Mental Health Program will be part of Pitt County Government. They will apply the new reform law to the Pitt County Mental Health Program.

Chairman Owens welcomed everyone and stated he appreciated their attendance. He said he had the list of speakers and if there was a group of people with the same interest they could designate someone to express their concerns and he would allow them additional time. He said the Board of Commissioners goal is to have the best mental health care for the people in this county.

Invocation and Pledge

The Invocation was offered by Commissioner Royal.
The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner James.

Approval of Agenda

Motion:

Motion to approve the agenda as submitted.
Motion made by Commissioner Eugene James.
Motion seconded by Commissioner Randy Royal.

Motion Passed Unanimously.

Public Hearing - *Mental Health Restructuring*

Meeting Notes

Mr. Scott Elliott spoke of the Mental Health Reform Legislation, House Bill 381 or Session Law 2001-437. The new legislation outlines changes to be made to the governance, structure and financing of mental health services at the state and local levels, effective July 1, 2002. The biggest changes are the privatization of mental health services and the role of local government will be to manage the privatized services. Current funding of Mental Health locally is \$1.6 million annually in county funds as well as an additional \$1.1 million annually through in-kind services. Pitt County funding is the 13th highest in the State.

The Pitt County Board of Commissioners have consider the options and determined that Mental Health will become a single-county program as a department of the County. There is a multi-step process being addressed by the County as follows:

- 1) Governance Decision - who will oversee the program
- 2) Local Business Plan to be formulated with preliminary submission due January, 2003 and final version due April, 2003
- 3) Local Management Entity (LME) decision needed by the Board of Commissioners by October 1, 2002

Choices:

- Phase I - LME State certified by July 1, 2002
- Phase II - LME State certification after July 3, 2003 and prior to July 1, 2004
- Phase III - (same as Phase II)

The purpose of the public hearing is for public input in regard to the restructuring of the mental health program in for governance and system reform. The CORE committee motioned that Pitt County should take over the mental health center as a part of Pitt County Government and the business plan will be provided by January 1, 2003. Chairman Owens asked who was on the CORE committee. Mr. Elliott stated that some Mental Health Area Board members, County Manager, Assistant County Manager, County Finance Officer, Debra Dihoff, Area Director, some consumers, affiliate agency representatives, and others making up the committee of fifteen to twenty people.

Chairman Owens stated the public hearing was open for public comments. He called forward the speakers as follows:

1. Mae Stancil - spoke in support of the Board's decision for mental health to be a county department. She stated that there was not adequate information provided to the public on this matter. The Mental Health reform law has been clouded and only a small group of citizens understand the agency's plans. She hopes that Ms. Dihoff's supporters that are present identify themselves tonight. She said this is not the only agency providing services for county citizens. She said she understand that the Area Director recommends members for the Mental Health Area Board and they are family of clients or providers and most of the members show disregard for public officials. She stated an example of their disregard was in the handling of public concerns over the recent group home placement. She quoted Ms. Dihoff's salary and benefits at \$122,000 stating that it is higher than the County Manager and other county management staff and that her staff is paid half of what she makes in salary. She stated the Board should make mental health a county department as soon as possible.

2. Jane Barnhill - stated she lives north of the river and spoke of a memorandum to Area Program Directors and County Managers from Dr. Richard Visingardi concerning expected changes in HB 381 which states the State's expectations of the reorganization of the mental health programs. Phase I will be complete and they only have to do one of four things and furnish a timeline to meet the other requirements. She said there is a clear process for the expected changes. Someone in mental health should be able to handle these duties and they should not have to bring in someone from outside. She stated she was in favor of mental health becoming a county department and with the continuing fluctuation of the county's population with the university and the medical school Pitt County may meet the target goal. She asked that the Board consider the "home people" first in this decision.

3. David Crean - stated he was a resident of Cherry Oaks Subdivision and asked about the accountability of the mental health staff. He stated that next door to his home, the Mental Health agency and PRIDE Group Homes placed a group home. He said that PRIDE has a contractual obligation with mental health to provide this group home. He stated that the children in this group home are diagnosed with conduct disorders, such as behavior patterns where they are bullies, threatening, fights, weapons, may be physically cruel to people or animals, sexual activity, fire with serious damage, broken into homes, and they are teenagers with a high potential of violence. He spoke of a group home with two violent assaults and rape on record and no one informed the community of this home. He said Ms. Dihoff finally held a meeting where 250 residents attended that were opposed to this group home. The meeting was acrimonious. She informed residents that the law was on her side and there was nothing she or they could do to change this group home location. He spoke of her subsilant manner. He said she indicated that there was no one they could turn to and she objected to any reasonable plans put forth by the residents. He said the Mental Health Area Board should stay in and advisory capacity and the accountability should be with the Board of County Commissioners. He said that otherwise Mental Health becomes an independent kingdom and there would be no recourse to challenge their decisions.

4. Debra Culbertson - spoke of their three children. She stated that the family moved into the house on Lee Street and they thought they had moved into a safe neighborhood. She said they do not want their children associating with violent children. She said their home on Lee Street appeared to be in such a neighborhood. Shortly after signing on the purchase of this house, they found out about the Level 3 group home. They then became concerned about buying their house. At the time, they were living and working in Virginia so a friend attended the neighborhood meeting for them. She said they were told that questions were left unanswered and avoided. The meeting and information left them distressed and frustrated. She said that in the at-risk procedures, there is supposed to be collaboration but that was not done here. She said there was a record of crimes that are directed back to these homes in Pitt County but they are all denied by Mental Health staff. They had other questions about recorded events and issues but Mental Health officials deny the truth. At 417 Lee Street, children are moved in and cars are there throughout the day but children are not seen. She said they will not allow children to associate with these problem children. Mental Health has not managed this placement well and they recommend the Board of Commissioners take over the Mental Health program soon.

5. Kiki Siebels - stated that these issues are volatile issues. She stated that she has lived in Pitt County since she was seven years old. She stated her support of Mental Health falling under the Board of Commissioners' authority. The source of funding comes from taxpayers and requires accountability to the public. The Mental Health Area Board is appointed but the Board of Commissioners are elected so they are accountable. The appointed people are not as influenced by the public. Cherry Oaks residents have seen Mental Health take effect over their community without allowing them any input. They have had no opportunity to express their concerns. This has been forced upon us and their voice was silenced. She said that any entity funded by taxpayers must be held accountable. She said it is necessary to place Mental Health

under the Board of County Commissioners. She said she hopes the voice of the voting public is heard tonight.

6. Ed Congleton - said that Pitt County could be looking over the edge and it could be abysmal. He said things are changing fast and the County is giving up its influence. He spoke of the regional hospital and the medical school. He spoke of Pitt County providing the 13th highest contributions to Mental Health in the State. He said the Board needs to consider what is best for Pitt County. He said he questioned why the County would consider releasing its influence over the Mental Health program.

7. Grace Price - is a student at East Carolina University and serves on one of the committees. She said there are committees for every area. The Advisory Committee has representatives of every area. Anyone who wants to serve should contact the Mental Health Center. In consideration of the governance of Mental Health, she expressed concern about the political issues taking precedence over the actual needs. She asked if the State could withdraw funding if the County takes over Mental Health. She expressed concerned about the mentally ill, homeless, and other mental health clients.

8. Nancy Colville - said she had sat through six months of the Core Committee meetings. On February 13th there was a special meeting held for two hours for Deby Dihoff to address the Board of Commissioners on Mental Health reform where she rambled for over an hour. On February 27, the Mental Health Area Board met and Deby Dihoff reported. She spoke about a staff member of the Daily Reflector serving on the Mental Health Area Board. She said they were addressing financial and legal reform of Mental Health. She said that she was also concerned that this Board of Commissioners has failed to insist that Ms. Dihoff provide the Board with factual information because they didn't want to ruffle any feathers. She spoke about Ms. Dihoff commuting from Chapel Hill and not being accountable to anyone. She spoke of Ms. Dihoff's determination to merge Pitt County Mental Health into a multi-county program with other counties that do not fund their mental health programs as substantially as Pitt County. She said the Board has been unwilling to take control over the Mental Health program and self-serving interest of the Area Board. She said that the Mental Health governance is only one part of the equation and the business plan is one part. With Mental Health as a county program, savings will be made in finances, legal services, and other areas. The State has a completion date of 2007. She said who knows what the population will be in 2007. She spoke about the State's target population of 200,000 but that it is not a mandate. She said she supports Mental Health as a County Department and they should then search for an Area Director that has the good of Pitt County in their heart. She asked for all the people that were present and supportive of the single county program for mental health to stand.

Since there were not additional names on the list of speakers, Chairman Owens announced the public hearing closed at 7:30 p.m. He asked if any commissioners would like to speak.

Commissioner Johnson said that the public should know that there is a meeting of the CORE committee tomorrow morning (Wednesday, August 2, 2002) at 8:30 a.m. at Mental Health Center for continuing study of the business plan. This meeting is open to the public.

Adjourn

Motion:

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Eugene James.

Motion seconded by Vice Chairwoman Beth Ward.

Motion Passed Unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan J. Banks, CMC
Clerk to the Board