

September 21, 2015

A regular meeting of the Bladen County Board of Commissioners was held at 6:30 pm on Tuesday, September 21, 2015 in the Superior Courtroom of the Bladen County Courthouse, which was moved from the Commissioners Meeting Room of the Bladen County Courthouse.

The following members were present:

- Charles Ray Peterson, Chairman
- Russell Priest, Vice Chairman
- Billy Ray Pait
- G. Michael Cogdell
- Dr. Delilah Blanks
- Daniel Dowless
- Wayne Edge
- James G. "Jimmie" Smith
- Arthur Bullock

Attorney: Leslie Johnson, Johnson Law Firm
Allen Johnson, Johnson Law Firm

ITEM 1. Chairman Peterson called the meeting to order.

Reverend Larry Hayes, Good News Baptist Church of Bladenboro, provided the Invocation. County Manager Gregory J. Martin led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ITEM 2. Consent Items:

Upon a motion by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Pait, the Board approved the following Consent Items:

- A. Amended Agenda, to include consideration of Community Development Block Grant paperwork during a September 28, 2015 Special Board meeting
- B. Minutes of August 17, 2015 Special Meeting.
- C. Minutes of September 8, 2015 Special Meeting.
- D. Minutes of September 8, 2015 Regular Meeting.
- E. Budget Amendments as follows:

Central Services

<i>Expenditures</i>		<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>
105000.740	Capital Outlay-Equipment	8,035.63	
<i>Revenues</i>			
103190.011	Insurance Claims	8,035.63	

Invoices for Dewey Shaw for installation of new heat pump at Ag Center.

Library

<i>Expenditures</i>		<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>
106700.200	Supplies & Materials	961.36	
106700.234	Electronic Materials	2,920.45	
<i>Revenues</i>			
103630.011	LSTA Grant	3,881.81	

Grant for new computers and furniture.

Administration

<i>Expenditures</i>		<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>
106900.903	To DSS	24,510.00	
<i>Revenues</i>			
103190.050	Fund Balance Appropriated	24,510.00	

Funding Authorization #1 has been reduced until State Budget is passed.

Department of Social Services

<i>Revenues</i>			
143531.221	LIEAP/Admin		24,510.00
143550.080	Fm-General Fund	24,510.00	

First installment of LIEAP and CIP Administration funds. Additional funds will be released once the NC Budget is passed.

Department of Social Services

<i>Expenditures</i>		<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>
146100.688	Crisis Intervention Program	28,403.00	
<i>Revenues</i>			
143531.220	Crisis Intervention Program	28,403.00	

Funding Authorization #3.

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Department of Social Services

<i>Expenditures</i>		<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>
146100.6160.571	United Way-Caring for Kids	375.00	
<i>Revenues</i>			
143531.344	United Way-Caring for Kids	375.00	

This amendment is necessary due to the 3rd Quarter Allocation for Caring for Kids.

Solid Waste

<i>Expenditures</i>		<i>Increase</i>	<i>Decrease</i>
205800.352	Maintenance/Repair-Equipment	5,164.99	
<i>Revenues</i>			
203190.011	Insurance Claims	5,164.99	

Insurance reimbursement from Sedgewick Insurance Claims Inc. for bulldozer repair.

F. County Attorney Invoices.

Date	Department	Amount
9/10/15	Sheriff's Office	\$ 2,600.00
9/15/15	Governing Board	\$ 2,790.00
	Total	\$ 5,390.00

G. Tax Refunds and Releases No. 8-15, incorporated by reference and made a part of these minutes.

H. NC Cardinal Grant application.

ITEM 3. Matters of Interest to Commissioners:

No Board member presented an item for discussion.

ITEM 4. Individuals/Delegations Wishing to Address Commissioners:

A. Animal Control Advisory Board:

Animal Control Advisory Board Secretary Charlotte Smith presented the 2014-15 Annual Report. Ms. Smith shared the goals which were achieved during the reporting period as follows:

- Animal Shelter is now open to the public five (5) days a week.
- New grates have been installed for sheltered animals.
- A trust fund has been established for donations.
- Educational programs have been developed to be presented throughout the County.
- Educational programs, workshops and other activities have been offered at the shelter to bring the public into the shelter.
- More partnerships have progressed with surrounding communities.
- The shelter has been upgraded with new floor grates and new safety features.

Mrs. Smith stated that fewer animals were euthanized during the reporting period. Ms. Smith credited a rescue group, A Shelter Friend, for assisting with the declining numbers.

B. Ms. Sandra Guions:

Ms. Guions addressed the Board regarding Emergency Medical Services (EMS) within the County. She shared her concerns regarding additional staffing to serve the County, the need to assign quick response vehicles (QRV's) to supervisors to assist in EMS coverage, and she shared her thoughts regarding the EMS Training Officer's compensation.

Ms. Guions thanked the Board of Commissioners for the opportunity to voice her concerns.

C. Mr. George Keiper:

Mr. Keiper addressed the Board of Commissioner regarding a potential school closing/consolidation plan which has been recently released by the Board of Education. Mr. Keiper shared his thoughts regarding the closing of Booker T. Washington School and the Clarkton School of Discovery. Mr. Keiper has four children who are attending or have attended each of the schools in the

Clarkton area. He stated his concern with the possibility of either or both of the schools being closed.

D. Ms. Sabrina Murchison:

Ms. Murchison presented additional information regarding her concern with the possibility of closing the Clarkton School of Discovery. Ms. Murchison presented facts and figures which she obtained from Bladen County Schools Public Information Officer Valerie Newton. Ms. Murchison presented student enrollment and teaching staff at each primary and middle school in the County.

Ms. Murchison also requested approximate costs associated with closing/consolidating/relocating students and programs. Public Information Officer Valerie Newton shared the following information with Ms. Murchison:

“Because costs and programs vary considerably by district and individual school, a specific cost savings cannot be identified. Most of the savings result from non-classroom personnel costs which may or may not be required. Generally these positions include principals, assistant principals, clerical staff, food service and custodial personnel. Teaching staff is usually not included because the impact district-wide is based on retirements, resignations, and personnel who annually leave the district. In addition to any personnel savings, budget reductions will result from reduced utility cost, infrastructure maintenance cost, budgeted capital maintenance projects and all supplies.”

Ms. Murchison thanked the Board for the opportunity to share information regarding the possibility of closing schools in the County.

E. Mr. Joseph Rozier, Jr.:

Mr. Rozier also addressed the Board to voice his concern with possible school closings. Mr. Rozier shared that Plain View School is adjacent to two (2) of the largest employers in the County. He asked the Commissioners to consider investing in education and schools which could reduce the need for a detention and law enforcement center.

Following the individuals who addressed the Board, Chairman Peterson shared the following prepared statement:

I want to thank you for being here this evening to address the Board of County Commissioners and to share your thoughts regarding the School System’s decision last week to move forward with a proposed consolidation plan. We recognize that this is a difficult issue for our county.

It’s important for us to be reminded that the financial challenge that Bladen County Schools is experiencing is due, in large part, to the multi-year decline in student population and the corresponding loss of State funding – which is directly tied to the student population.

While State funding has declined, county funding has not declined. The Board of Commissioners has made a good-faith effort over the past 8-10 years to provide increased funding for Bladen County Schools, and the funding level per student reflects this.

Because Bladen County is a rural, low-wealth county, a report by the NC Public School Forum ranked Bladen County as 78th out of 100 NC counties in fiscal ability to support public schools in FY 2013. This same report, however, ranked Bladen as 29th out of 100 NC counties in its relative effort to support public schools. This reflects Bladen County’s good faith effort in providing financial support for the public schools.

Additionally, in 2010 and two times in 2014, the Board of Commissioners called for a referendum to give the citizens of Bladen County an opportunity to approve an additional one-quarter percent sales tax. Even though the revenue could legally be used for any county purpose, the Board of Commissioners pledged to earmark the proceeds specifically for Bladen County Schools. However, in each referendum the voters soundly defeated this measure.

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I would like to take this opportunity to state clearly that the Board of Commissioners cannot enact the additional one quarter percent sales tax without voter approval. The legislation authorizing the sales tax requires approval by the voters of the county. The Board of Commissioners has formally requested that the NC General Assembly revise the legislation to allow Boards of County Commissioners to enact this tax without voter approval.

Due to a reduction in State funding in FY 2014, Bladen County Schools used a large amount of fund balance from the General Fund – and even more from the Capital Outlay Fund, for general operating expenses. Primarily, these funds were used to maintain staff positions previously funded with revenue from the State.

It's concerning that \$1.2 million from the Capital Outlay Fund was transferred to Current Expense, when the school system has identified so many capital needs.

In addition to this transfer of Capital Outlay funds for General Fund expenses, over \$700,000 in fund balance was used that year, leaving approximately \$150,000 in fund balance in the General Fund as of June 30, 2014.

Then, in May of this year, near the end of the 2015 fiscal year, the Board of Education requested the Board of Commissioners to approve another transfer of \$495,000 from Capital Outlay to the General Fund in order to meet its financial obligations. In accordance with NC General Statute, the Board of County Commissioners could not legally approve the transfer. Therefore, the Board of Commissioners ultimately appropriated \$350,000 from Fund Balance so Bladen County Schools could pay its bills.

As helpful as it might be for the school system, Bladen County is not in a financial position to supplant the loss of State funding to Bladen County Schools.

The Board of County Commissioners is challenged with providing sufficient funding for quality services and programs throughout the county while striving to maintain a reasonable tax burden for our citizens, many of whom are on fixed incomes.

There are many critical needs and mandated services for Bladen County to fund or provide, including the recent requirement to raise the property tax rate to fund a new jail to replace Bladen County's fifty year old, overcrowded jail. These are not easy decisions. However, with the high cost of housing inmates in neighboring counties and with pressure from the Senior Resident Superior Court Judge to build a new jail, the Board acted in the County's best interest by moving forward with this project.

As county commissioners, we understand and appreciate the difficult budgetary challenges faced by the Board of Education in providing students a quality education in an environment of declining students and state revenue.

At the same time, as commissioners, we understand the responsibility we have – and the members of the Board of Education have – to be good stewards of taxpayer funds and to manage within our respective budgets.

The members of the Board of Commissioners strongly support education, specifically Bladen County Schools – and that support has been demonstrated by increasing financial support over the past 8-10 years, even during difficult economic times. Even though many counties reduced funding for school systems during difficult economic times, Bladen County chose not to reduce school funding.

Again, it's important to understand that the financial challenge that Bladen County Schools is experiencing is due in large part to the multi-year decline in student population and the corresponding loss of State funding.

We realize that the Board of Education faces difficult decisions in developing an operating plan that will both provide for the educational needs of our students and be economically sustainable.

Chairman Peterson briefly recessed the meeting at 7:13pm in order to move back to the Commissioners Room on the lower level of the Courthouse.

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Chairman Peterson reconvened the meeting at 7:30pm.

ITEM 5. Public Hearing:

- A. Chairman Peterson declared open a Public Hearing to receive comments regarding a rezoning request.
Joe Bland, with Norris Thompson Engineering, addressed the Board representing Par 5 Development Group, LLC and property owners Floyd and Pat Merritt. Both the property owners and development group requested to rezone the property located on US Hwy. 701 N, near Merritt's Pottery (PIN #1332-00-67-8372). No one else addressed the Board.
Chairman Peterson declared closed the Public Hearing.
- B. The Board of County Commissioners determined that this rezoning request is consistent with the adopted 2013-2030 Bladen County Land Use Plan and that the request is reasonable and is in the public interest. Upon a motion by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Pait, the Board unanimously approved a rezoning request to rezone property identified by PIN #1332-00-67-8372 from Residential/Agricultural (RA) to Commercial (C).

ITEM 6. Bladen County Schools: (Sharon Penny, Finance Officer):

- A. Mrs. Penny presented two (2) NC Education Lottery applications for Public School Building Capital Fund requests. Both applications are regarding capital projects at Elizabethtown Middle School. A roof replacement project in the amount of \$325,810 and replacement of air conditioning units in the amount of \$37,570. Upon a motion by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Priest, the Board unanimously approved the two NC Education Lottery applications for Public School Building Capital Fund for the two projects at Elizabethtown Middle School.

ITEM 7. Finance Office: (Lisa Coleman, Finance Officer)

- A. County Manager Greg Martin reviewed the Financial Dashboard, in Mrs. Coleman's absence, for the two-month period ending August 31, 2015.

ITEM 8. Health and Human Services Agency: (Cris Harrelson, Director)

- A. Mr. Harrelson provided an overview of a Memorandum of Agreement with NC Incredible Years Network for the Young Families Connect program. A partnership between Prevent Child Abuse and Bladen County Health Department will support a successful Basic Preschool and School Age parent program. Incredible Years Basic Program is an evidence-based program that is designed for families experiencing challenges with their children's behavior. Upon a motion by Commissioner Blanks, seconded by Commissioner Pait, the Board unanimously approved a Memorandum of Agreement with NC Incredible Years Network.
- B. Mr. Harrelson provided a brief overview of an agreement with Home Health Advantage. Home Health Advantage will provide Home Health ICD 10 coding and corrections for billing purposes. The outsourcing of this process will allow for additional review for coding correctness and capturing all required information for ease of collection. Upon a motion by Commissioner Edge, seconded by Commissioner Bullock, the Board unanimously approved an agreement with Home Health Advantage.

ITEM 9. Emergency Medical Services: (David Howell, Chief)

A. Mr. Howell provided an overview of the current EMS plan and proposed plan revisions for information and input from the Board. As requested, Mr. Howell shared information and reasoning for an additional truck, as follows:

- Bladen County is a large rural area.
- The population is aging.
- Call volume is increasing.
- Response time could be reduced.
- Bladen County EMS is responsible for maintaining paramedic level of care.
- The potential for mass casualty incidents due to Dupont and Smithfield. Dupont does have company emergency medical technicians, at a basic level of certification.
- Bladen County EMS must be prepared when anyone initiates the 911 system.
- In response to an increased cost to volunteers to maintain coverage.

Following discussion regarding response times, additional information regarding specific type of calls will be extracted for further review and will be presented at a future meeting.

Mr. Howell provided an overview of a revised quick response vehicles (QRV) plan. Currently, the EMS director and training officer have been assigned QRV's which will be driven home. The training officer lives in Elizabethtown and the director lives in Bladenboro. These QRV's will allow for additional coverage during the evening and early morning hours. Data will continue to be reviewed in order to develop a plan for additional operational QRV's. Mr. Howell stated that he would report to the Board following plan development.

Mr. Howell reviewed short- and long-term recommendations as follows:

Short Term Recommendations

- One (1) additional night unit from 6pm-6am, plus shifting one existing unit to Dublin/Tar Heel at midnight.
- Add one (1) basic and one (1) paramedic to help staff an additional unit. Part-time to complete staffing of that additional unit.
- Complete a pay study to address staffing issues.

Long Term Recommendations

- Adjust pay based on pay study findings
- Increase regular staff positions (2 Paramedics and 2 EMT-Basic)
- Re-examine coverage areas to explore the need for additional units for possible budgeting based on call volume.

Following discussion, Mr. Howell plans to update the Board at a future meeting regarding QRV use and response times, consideration of adjusting stationed units for day coverage and consideration of additional QRV's being assigned to Paramedic level employees.

ITEM 10. General Services: (Robert Mazur, Director)

A. Mr. Mazur provided a brief overview of a Maintenance Agreement Addendum with ThyssenKrupp Elevator Corporation regarding a modernization project at a cost of \$58,721. The scope of work includes a complete overhaul of the elevator located in the Courthouse. It is expected to out of service for approximately 2-3 weeks during the project.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Edge, the Board unanimously approved the Maintenance Agreement Addendum.

B. Mr. Mazur presented an addendum to a service agreement with Aramark Uniform Services for an additional five (5) years. The addendum offered by

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Aramark reflects a 10% decrease in pricing, resulting in annual savings of approximately \$908.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Cogdell, the Board unanimously approved the addendum to a service agreement with Aramark Uniform Services.

- C. Mr. Mazur provided an overview of a proposed wireless service agreement by US Cellular. Verizon Wireless is the current vendor. He shared that monthly savings of approximately \$921 would be realized.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Cogdell, seconded by Commissioner Smith, and pending legal review by the County Attorney, the Board unanimously approved the US Cellular Wireless Service Agreement.

ITEM 11. Advisory Board Appointments:

- A. **Keep Bladen Beautiful (1):** Upon a motion by Commissioner Edge, seconded by Commissioner Pait, the Board unanimously reappointed Mary Bellamy for a period of three years, with the term expiring September 30, 2018.

- B. **Voluntary Agricultural Districts Committee (2):** Upon a motion by Commissioner Edge, seconded by Commissioner Pait, the Board, waiving the policy on terms, unanimously reappointed Russell Patterson and Joyce Walters for a period of three years, with the terms expiring September 30, 2018.

- C. **Watershed Review Board (3):** Upon a motion by Commissioner Blanks, seconded by Commissioner Cogdell, the Board, waiving the policy on terms, unanimously reappointed Lorenza Graham, Terry Macon and Horace Munn to three year terms with the terms expiring September 6, 2018.

ITEM 12. County Manager: (Greg Martin)

- A. Mr. Martin reviewed the Board calendars for September and October, 2015. Upon a motion by Commissioner Cogdell, seconded by Commissioner Blanks, the Board unanimously approved including an update of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) related policies to the Special Meeting agenda scheduled for 4:30pm on Monday, September 28, 2015.

- B. Mr. Martin reviewed Requests for Qualifications recently received regarding a detention and law enforcement center construction project. The request was in reference to Special Inspections. Mr. Martin reviewed the four firms who submitted requested information. They are as follows:

- ECS Carolinas, LLP
- S&ME
- Summit Engineering
- Terracon Consultants, Inc.

At a prior meeting, Mr. Martin shared with the Board that ECS Carolinas, LLP would be the preferred vendor. Following discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Edge, seconded by Commissioner Smith, the Board unanimously approved ECS Carolinas, LLP to perform special inspections for a detention and law enforcement center project.

- C. The Board viewed a brief video update regarding NC Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) activities.

ITEM 13. Individuals/Delegations wishing to address Board of Commissioners:

- A. Ms. Helen Keiper addressed the Board regarding the possible closing of Clarkton School of Discovery and Booker T. Washington School in the Clarkton school district. Mrs. Keiper expressed her appreciation to the Board for having an opportunity to attend the Board meeting and address the Board. She also shared her appreciation to the Board for the view shared by the

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Chairman regarding county funding of Bladen County Schools. She expressed her feeling that budget issues are not being handled efficiently within Bladen County Schools.

- B. Ms. Jennifer McMillian addressed the Board regarding the possible closure of Plain View School and how much that school means to the surrounding community. She shared that without Plain View, there would be no sense of community. She also shared her concerns over children being bussed for additional miles before and after school. She indicated her fears of creating over-worked and stressed out children who may have to get up much earlier to commute to and from school.

In closing, Ms. McMillian implored the Board of County Commissioners to prayerfully consider other options other than closing Plain View School.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Edge, seconded by Commissioner Pait, the meeting was adjourned at 8:37 pm.

ATTEST:

Maria C. Edwards, Clerk to the Board

Charles R. Peterson, Chairman
Bladen County Board of Commissioners