

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
NOVEMBER 1, 2021**

BE IT REMEMBERED that the Board of Commissioners of Northampton County met on November 1, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at the Northampton County Cultural and Wellness Center, 9536 Highway 305, Jackson, North Carolina, with the following present: Charles Tyner, Geneva Faulkner, Joyce Buffaloe, Kelvin Edwards and Nicole Boone.

Others Present: Jaime Mason, Paul Nowell, Doris Garner, Itia Robertson, Robert Murphy and Scott McKellar.

Call to Order (Tab 1):

Mr. Tyner called the meeting to order.

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance (Tab 2):

Mr. Tyner called for a moment of silence and followed with an invitation for all present to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda (Tab 3):

A motion was made by Ms. Boone, seconded by Dr. Edwards, to approve the agenda for November 1, 2021 as amended to delete the Consent Agenda (Tab 5) and to correct that Mary Martin will be the presented for Opioid Navigator from Upper Coastal Plains (Tab 8). **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Conflict of Interest (Tab 4):

Mr. Tyner read the conflict of interest statement and asked if any Board member had a conflict with any matter on the approved agenda. No conflict was reported.

State of the County Address (Tab 6):

Mr. Tyner led a "State of the County" presentation highlighting the following areas:

Finance

- There is a healthy fund balance and all audits are up to date.
- County is refinancing all of its "old debt" through pending bond refundings.
- Board has undertaken a pay classification study for employees.
- Collected over \$900,000 in the last year on back taxes.

Upcoming Projects

- Plans for the new courthouse construction were presented, which will be funded (approximately \$10-\$14 million) through State appropriations at no cost to Northampton citizens.
- The former Odom Prison is being given to the County by the State at no cost.
- Water Extension Phase 5 will provide County water for over 200 additional residents. This \$4.9 million project will be financed by the USDA.
- The County anticipates receiving a \$4 million federal grant to develop and construct affordable housing for federal, state and local employees to provide infrastructure for the County workforce and especially local teachers.
- A plan has been presented to the USDA for a wastewater line project to run from the Town of Gaston to Lake Gaston, which would serve the County's western resident and provide infrastructure for future economic development.
- The Board is pursuing the construction of a new Wellness Center on Lake Gaston. The anticipated project cost of \$8 million is to be funded by state by state and federal resources.
- There is an anticipated road expansion of Highway 46 at Exit 176 off of I-95 which will provide opportunities to recruit restaurants, hotels and fueling stations, thereby providing significant increases to the County's tax base.
- The County has reached an agreement with NCCAR, providing for the sale of the property to NCCAR and the County recouping its \$1.8 million investment in the project.

Rich Square W.S. Creecy School

The County has acquired this property and space has been cleared for a walking track and playground. The gym has been rehabilitated for recreational use. Electrical and HVAC work are to occur within the building in order facilitate further renovations.

Conway EMS Building

The County acquired the former Conway-Severn Rescue Squad property that had closed and is now being used for County EMS services. From January 1, 2021 through October 27, 2021, approximately 1,324 emergency calls have been answered.

Grocery Store / Ace Hardware

This project spearheaded by the Board has established a profitable and much-needed business in Jackson. The County has seen a significant increase in its sales tax receipts as a result.

State and Federal Appropriations

The following funds are in the current State budget pending final adoption by the North Carolina General Assembly:

- Gaston - \$250,000;
- Garysburg - \$250,000;
- Rich Square - \$300,000;
- Woodland - \$250,000;
- Seaboard - \$250,000;
- Severn - \$250,000;

- Conway - \$250,000; and
- Jackson - \$250,000.

In addition, the County anticipates receiving \$14 million from the State for the new courthouse project and an additional \$1 million for local municipalities. Pending federal appropriations are expected to total approximately \$9 million, which funds will be used for the workforce housing project, new courthouse construction and other ongoing projects.

Department of Aging

The County now owns the former JW Faison Center and has completely renovated the building for the purposes of reinstating a fully functional senior program, including Meals on Wheels.

Mr. Tyner concluded by highlighting that the County has had an increase in sales and property tax revenue. The future objective of the current Board is to lower property taxes. A new strategic plan will be developed and citizen input will be sought. No Board action was taken on any of these items.

Appointment of Interim Clerk to the Board (Tab 7):

A motion was made by Ms. Faulkner, seconded by Ms. Boone, to appoint Itia Robertson as Interim Clerk to the Board and Assistant to the County Manager. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Opioid Navigator from Upper Coastal Plains (Tab 8):

Mary Martin from the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments appeared and presented the Board with a summary of the national opioid litigation settlement and noted the January 2022 deadline for counties to participate. No Board action was taken.

New County Ambulance Purchase (Tab 9):

Paul Nowell, EMS Director, appeared and presented a decision paper seeking the Board's approval to purchase a new 2022 Ford E-450 Type III ambulance. The lowest of the three bids submitted was from Northwestern Emergency Vehicles for \$198,642.00. A motion thereafter was made by Dr. Edwards, seconded by Ms. Buffaloe, to approve the bid submitted by Northwestern Emergency Vehicles in amount of \$198,642.00 and to authorize the ambulance purchase. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Health Department Budget Amendment (Tab 10):

Doris Garner, Finance Department, presented the Board with Budget Amendment No. 7 in the amount of \$29,644.00 to add additional state funding received for the COVID-19 vaccination program by the Health Department. A motion thereafter was made by Ms. Faulkner, seconded by Ms. Boone, to approve the Budget Amendment as presented. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

HOME Program Housing Consortium Resolution (Tab 11):

Mr. Tyner presented the Board with a Resolution Establishing a HOME Program Housing Consortium to support the establishment of the Choanoke Area Housing Consortium along with Bertie, Halifax and Hertford Counties. A motion thereafter was made by Ms. Faulkner, seconded by Ms. Buffaloe, to approve the Resolution as presented. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Settlement Agreement with NCCAR (Tab 12):

Scott McKellar, County Attorney, presented the Board with a proposed Settlement Agreement between the County and North Carolina Center for Automotive Research, Inc. to resolve pending litigation between the parties. A motion thereafter was made by Dr. Edwards, seconded by Ms. Boone, to approve the Settlement Agreement as presented. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Tax Matters (Tab 13):

Jaime Mason, Tax Administrator, presented Ad Valorem tax appeals for motor vehicles in the total amount of \$28.68 on 1 appeals. A motion thereafter was made by Ms. Boone, seconded by Dr. Edwards, to approve the refund and corresponding appeal as presented. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Ms. Mason next the late application for disability exemption filed by Jason Owens. A motion thereafter was made by Ms. Faulkner, seconded by Ms. Boone, to approve the exemption application upon a finding that good cause was shown by the taxpayer for failure to make a timely application. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Budget Amendments (Tab 14):

Doris Garner, Finance Department, presented the Board with Budget Amendment No. 8 in the amount of \$98,000.00 appropriated from fund balance to capital outlay for the purpose of purchasing the new County ambulance as presented earlier by Mr. Nowell and approved by the Board under Tab 9. A motion thereafter was made by Dr. Edwards, seconded by Ms. Buffaloe, to approve the Budget Amendment as presented. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion Carried.**

Citizen Comments (Tab 15):

Mac Sykes requested copies of all recent written correspondence between the Board and the Board of Education and further questioned why the County Attorney attend a recent Board of Education meeting and who paid for his attendance.

Clinton Williams expressed concerns about the Attorney's attendance at the recent Board of Education meeting and asked for the Board's position on improving local school performance. He asked for plan for hiring a new County Manager and asked for the Board's support on calling for a halt to hate mail he is receiving.

Interim County Manager Comments (Tab 15):

None.

Board Comments (Tab 15):

Dr. Edwards thanked everyone for their attendance.

Ms. Buffaloe also expressed her appreciation for those who came out tonight.

Ms. Boone stated that it was good to see everyone. She expressed her frustration and outrage at the hate mail reported by Clinton Williams.

Ms. Faulkner praised Lillie Pernell at the Northampton Memorial Library and her efforts to engage high schoolers. She also stated that she wanted to see a 24-hour medical facility in the County.

Mr. Tyner thanked the Board members for their service. He stated that the Board of Commissioners is in charge of the fiscal management of the County. In addition, the position of County Manager is open and the County seeks qualified applicants.

Closed Session (Tab 16):

A motion was made by Ms. Faulkner, seconded by Ms. Boone, that the Board enter into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. §§143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel, (a)(3) Attorney-Client Privilege and (a)(4) EDC Report. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion carried.**

Adjourn (Tab 17):

There being no further business upon return from closed session, a motion was made by Ms. Faulkner, seconded by Ms. Boone, to adjourn. **Question Called: All present voting yes. Motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted this 1st day of November, 2021.

Scott McKellar
County Attorney / Acting Secretary