

*Special joint meeting, Scotland County Board of Commissioners and Laurinburg City Council
August 31, 2009, 507 West Covington Street, Laurinburg*

MINUTES

**Scotland County Board of Commissioners and Laurinburg City Council
Special Joint Meeting, August 31, 2009
507 West Covington Street, Laurinburg**

At 6 p.m. Chairman J. D. Willis called the special joint meeting to order. Commissioners in attendance: Chairman Willis, Vice Chair Betty Blue Gholston and Commissioners John Alford, Bob Davis, Guy McCook, Joyce McDow and Clarence McPhatter. Staff in attendance: County Manager Kevin Patterson, County Attorney Ed Johnston and Clerk to the Board Ann W. Kurtzman.

Councilmember Rembert Deberry delivered the invocation.

Chairman Willis said the purpose of the meeting would be to discuss the proposal by the Village of Pinehurst to acquire the WestPoint Stevens Water/Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The City Council called its meeting to order with the following Councilmembers in attendance: Mayor Matthew Block and Councilmembers Tommy Parker, Herbert Rainer (*arrived at 6:30 p.m.*), Rembert Deberry, Amanda Faulk and Curtis Leak. Staff included City Manager Ed Burchins, City Attorney Doug Hicks, City Clerk Dee Hammond and Deputy City Clerk Jenny Tippett.

County Manager Patterson discussed events that led up to the letter of intent presented to the Commissioners by the Village of Pinehurst. Mr. Patterson said he met with Moore County and called other municipalities in Moore County to receive input on the proposal by the Village of Pinehurst. Mr. Patterson said the letter of intent invites the City of Laurinburg and Scotland County to be participants in a WestPoint Stevens water treatment plant consortium.

Mr. Patterson said the Village also provided information on consortium alternatives, although the consortium most likely would be a water/sewer authority.

Mr. Patterson said the letter of intent is only as good the Village of Pinehurst's word since all else regarding purchase of the property is unknown.

Attorney Johnston discussed the need for the County to enter into a contract with the Village of Pinehurst that very specifically protects whatever the Board of Commissioners feels should be protected.

Chairman Willis said there are many unanswered questions – the makeup of a consortium, the capital dollars involved, for example. He added that before the Commissioners consider authorizing the purchase it should have more concrete information in hand along with a contract.

County Manager Patterson said the Village of Pinehurst said it indicated it would continue to serve Gullistan and make available up to 500,000 gallons daily for any future industrial growth. Mr. Patterson said the 500,000 gallons daily would be adequate.

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Commissioner McCook and Councilmember Parker shared their concerns about timing. Both officials indicated that a lengthy waiting period before taking action might result in WestPoint Stevens falling into private hands.

Chairman Willis said if it was privately owned, the property would remain on the tax books.

Councilmember Parker said the County has the leverage to hammer out an agreement where it could exercise significant control over the water.

Chairman Willis said that both boards seem to be in agreement except that the Commissioners are not yet ready to make a decision by tomorrow night.

City Manager Burchins suggested the issue be studied from an economic and engineering standpoint, both of which have not yet been studied. He said the City and County water needs are in decent shape now and in the future but down the road, there might be a transition from ground to surface water that would have to be addressed.

County Manager Patterson said a WestPoint Stevens water authority would have to bring in enough entities to consume the water and actually pay for it or the venture would be costly.

Commissioner Davis said the County would be out of the game if WestPoint Stevens winds up in private hands. He added that gallons per day should be assured because if they are ever reduced it is difficult to get the gallons back.

Chairman Willis suggested the City develop a plan since its staff is knowledgeable in water/wastewater issues. Mr. Burchins said the City might need a minimum of 90 days for further study.

County Manager Patterson said the Village of Pinehurst has not conducted an engineering study but instead relied on the Region N report made available through the Lumber River Council of Governments.

Commissioner McCook said he believes the County will approve the Village of Pinehurst's request to purchase the facility. How involved Scotland County will be in the consortium is at issue. Commissioner McCook said he did not envision the City and County buying and upgrading the plant.

Councilmember Parker said grants would be easier to get if the project is a regional one so it would be important for the County to capitalize on the leverage it has to structure the most beneficial agreement.

Vice Chair Gholston said her concern about a consortium is who would inherit the debt.

Commissioner McPhatter said he feels like the County was placed in the middle of a political situation where the Village of Pinehurst did not even notify Moore County of its intentions. Commissioner McPhatter said Moore County should be a part of this.

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Commissioners and Councilmembers generally agreed they felt “blindsided” by the way the Village of Pinehurst went about the proposed acquisition process.

Councilmember Parker insisted the County has the leverage to structure an agreement any way it wants but if the facility goes private, it might be taxable but it also might prevent the County from recruiting additional industry.

The general consensus of the City Council and the Board of Commissioners was that more time is needed before the County takes action on the request. City Manager Burchins said he didn’t think it would upset the Village of Pinehurst to wait about 90 days since the Village had five months to study the project while the City and County have only had four weeks to do the same.

Motion was made by Commissioner Alford and duly seconded by Vice Chair Gholston authorizing the City and County Managers, City staff, City and County attorneys to take up to 90 days to provide information needed in order for the County to make a decision on the proposed acquisition of the WestPoint Stevens Water/Wastewater Treatment Plant by the Village of Pinehurst. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

On another issue, City Manager Burchins discussed the visioning process where the quest for funding, developing alternative energy and expanding fiber optic capabilities, for example, would be the focus of a broad-based group of representatives from the City, County, schools, community college, St. Andrews, the hospital. The purpose of a visioning group would be to develop a common vision for the next five, ten and 15 years.

Mayor Block said it was important to involve elected officials for the visioning process in order to bring about change.

Commissioner McPhatter said the visioning group must be all-inclusive and bring in elected officials from Wagram and Gibson and the unincorporated communities.

Motion was made by Commissioner Alford and duly seconded by Commissioner Davis to adjourn. Vote: Motion unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

The City Council also moved to adjourn at this time.

Ann W. Kurtzman
Clerk to the Board

J.D. Willis
Chairman