

*Joint Meeting: Scotland County Board of Commissioners/Laurinburg City Council
February 10, 2004, Laurinburg City Chambers*

MINUTES

**Scotland County Board of Commissioners
Joint Session with the Laurinburg City Council, February 10, 2004,
City Council Chamber, 303 W. Church St., Laurinburg, NC**

Commissioners in attendance: Chairman David Burns, Vice Chair Nancy J. Shelley, Commissioners Betty Blue Gholston, Charles “Scoofer” Jordan, Sam Snowdon, Clint Willis and J.D. Willis. Staff in attendance: Clerk to the Board Ann W. Kurtzman.

At 6:30 p.m., Chairman Burns called the recessed meeting to order and Mayor Ann B. Slaughter called the City Council meeting to order. Institute of Government Professor David Lawrence was in attendance to discuss and to answer questions with regard to consolidation.

Mr. Lawrence said there have been six attempts at city/county consolidation by referendum and two additional attempts by charter since 1970 in North Carolina. None were successful. He described such attempts as “politically difficult.”

He discussed city/county consolidation and how it works. He said the city is abandoned and merges with the county. Because city and county services are different, and there is little overlap in those services, city residents pay a service tax for living in a district rather than a city tax. The administrative structure is simplified.

He said a city/county consolidation could take between six months and 18 months to accomplish. The procedure begins with a commission of citizens who develop a charter. The charter must be approved by the governing bodies and approved by a vote of the majority of citizens before it proceeds to the General Assembly for consideration.

Mr. Lawrence explained why consolidations are not successful. In defining the size and political nature of the governing board, especially when combining partisan with non-partisan, there will be opponents.

In law enforcement, a police department would merge with a Sheriff’s department and not vice versa. The Sheriff would have to endorse such an effort.

In the consolidation of a city and county there is not a lot of functional overlap. Mergers occur between the governing bodies and the administration, which does not result in the saving of a lot of money.

Mr. Lawrence said on the plus side, consolidation could result in better coordination and a simplification of services, which allow citizens to resolve problems quickly.

Mr. Lawrence then discussed consolidation of services as opposed total consolidation. Contractual services are options. He advised both governing bodies to look at their departments and determine where an overlap of services could be refined. “There can be mergers of particular functions to create efficiencies,” he said.

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He said such consolidations require only approval of the governing bodies involved.

City Councilman Curtis Leak commented that residents in Laurel Hill, which is unincorporated, would benefit most by any consolidation of services.

Commissioner Snowdon said that the City and County already have a good track record in consolidation activities. He identified inspections, the water system, elections and parks and recreation as examples.

Commissioner Snowdon suggested that perhaps bringing the schools into a city/county consolidation effort plan might translate into efficiencies, such as with the purchase of supplies or fuel or the creation of a single IT (information technology) department.

Mr. Lawrence said buying insurance collectively would be an alternative.

City Manager Joe Huffman said that since September 11, 2001 he has learned that it is better to have redundancy in the area of communications.

Mr. Huffman pointed out that in the past the City and County have had success in joint grant applications.

It was agreed that the City and County would look at their various departments to see where there are similarities and bring the information back to another meeting. It also was agreed that the meeting would be scheduled after both governing bodies hold their planning retreats.

Motion was made by Commissioner Snowdon and duly seconded by Commissioner Jordan to recess until February 16, 2004 at 7 p.m. in the Commissioners Chamber. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann W. Kurtzman
Clerk

David L. Burns
Chairman