

*Scotland County Board of Commissioners Planning Session
September 18, 2003*

MINUTES

**Scotland County Board of Commissioners
Planning Work Session September 18, 2003
Scotland County Complex, 1405 West Boulevard, Laurinburg, NC**

At 2:00 p.m., Chairman David L. Burns reconvened the Planning Work Session, which had been recessed from the September 8, 2003 regular meeting. Commissioners in attendance: Chairman Burns, Vice Chair Nancy J. Shelley, Betty Blue Gholston, Charles "Scoofer" Jordan, Sam Snowdon, Clint Willis and J.D. Willis. Staff in attendance: County Manager Scott T. Sauer, County Attorney Ed Johnston and Clerk to the Board Ann W. Kurtzman.

The Board prioritized agenda items for discussion.

Financial Review

Finance Officer Charles Williams said the County still is in the yearend grip of GASB 34, which leaves some things undecided, such as sales tax, which will go from a quarterly to monthly distribution. July sales tax will be in this month. The County usually gets July, August and September on November 15. All this impacts how finances will look.

Mr. Williams said the majority of the \$2 million-plus dollars in Revenue is sales tax for August, which includes the hold harmless money from FY 2002-2003. It's likely the money will be pulled back into last year once the audit is completed. If this happens, it would represent no gain or loss.

Mr. Williams said the August 2003 sales tax receipt not including Article 44 is \$50,000 less than it was a year ago, which indicates sales tax is down. But if the State changes the way it distributes sales tax, the County may have anywhere from \$300,000 to \$900,000 at the end of this year that normally would not be in this year. The report includes \$365,000 in hold harmless sales tax money from last year although it didn't come in until August.

Based on where the County is now, Mr. Williams said Fund Balance would pretty much hold. The only heavy expenditure coming out of Fund Balance this year would be from funds restricted for the Health Department expansion.

Mr. Williams said Expenditures are scrutinized closely before a requisition is approved.

County Manager Sauer said the local Medicaid match also is closely watched because it is an uncontrolled expense where there still remains a potential for Federal adjustments.

Mr. Williams said that because of GASB 34 a final accounting through an audit might not be available until December.

Tax Administrator Kep Kepley said that real estate revenue collections are down slightly this year compared to last year because tax payments up until yearend are voluntary.

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Vehicle collections are running about even because that is on a monthly billing cycle. There is a little bit of a drag on real estate prior year collections. Mr. Kepley said that might be because more people are not working and the Tax Office is currently short staffed, which diminishes collection efforts. He expects the collection rate to attain the current year projection.

Mr. Williams reminded the Board that it approved using the sales tax ADM fund for school capital outlay rather than school debt, which could mean property taxes would have to be used to pay the school debt if sales tax falls behind.

Determining the “ideal” tax rate for Scotland County

Commissioner Jordan suggested bringing in a consultant to look for more efficient methods on how the County does business in order to bring about savings.

Commissioner Clint Willis said that services should be provided to support the best interests of the taxpayer, so that does not always mean we should cut. Departments should articulate what they would do differently this year from last to improve upon service and then budget accordingly. The Commissioners should not sharp shoot or micromanage the County.

Commissioner J.D. Willis said he would have a problem with bringing in consultants to tell the County where it could cut. Department Heads should know where cuts could be made. The governing body should first decide how much the citizens could afford to pay and then task Department Heads to come up with a budget to live within that means.

Commissioner Gholston said she does not see the governing body continuing to ask Department Heads to keep cutting and reducing in the face of State and Federal guidelines that are beyond the control of the Board. She said the schools would always dictate the tax rate to a large degree and keep the tax rate high while the County would continue to cut to the point where it could no longer function.

Commissioner J.D. Willis said that the State and Federal governments should be challenged. He said the Board must leave the schools alone and go on to something else because it's been done to death. He said that the last election showed the people are happy with the school board since all four incumbents were reelected and none of the Commissioner incumbents were reelected.

Commissioner Snowdon said that the Board should tell all Department Heads to cut 10 percent or any agreed upon percentage so the Commissioners could start planning now and not wait any longer.

Commissioner Clint Willis said DSS would begin by changing the way it provides services by reacting to the needs of the citizens. The plan includes determining what results are needed and then develop a plan to get there. The plan could apply to anybody.

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Commissioner Jordan said the objective of a consultant is to help find a better way of doing what already is being done.

County Manager Sauer said departments daily work to save money. He provided examples:

- Administration renegotiated the telephone contract for a \$32,000 potential annual savings.
- The County Engineer beat Site Solutions engineers out of \$40,000 in designing the Splash Park. That's because someone is looking after those costs.
- The Tax Office finished the year with \$82,000 left through efficiencies and spending just what it needs.
- When the Sheriff's books were closed and audited, \$93,000 remained.
- The Jail saved \$110,000.
- EMS had \$68,000 left partially through deferred maintenance.

The County Manager said those funds go back into Fund Balance, and maybe those stories need to be told a little more frequently department by department, program by program so the Commissioners know what is being done to save money.

Vice Chair Shelley said there is a lot of room for taxes to increase, and she is concerned about people on fixed incomes.

Commissioner Jordan said that in reviewing expenditures by Department, he has noticed in several cases significant jumps from one year to the next.

County Manager Sauer suggested that Commissioner Jordan pick the Departments so Department Heads an explanation of expenditures could be reviewed.

Motion was made by Commissioner Jordan and duly seconded by Commissioner J.D. Willis authorizing the County Manager to solicit proposals from at least three consulting firms on how they would conduct a County government efficiency assessment. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Before moving to the next item, Vice Chair Shelley asked the Commissioners to review a letter from the Human Relations Commission inviting agencies to meet its members 7 p.m., November 17, 2003, at Scotland Place. Chairman Burns and Laurinburg City Mayor Ann B. Slaughter would sign the letter.

The Board by consensus expressed support of Chairman Burns signing the letter.

Board of Equalization and Review

Commissioner Snowdon reported that the Board of Equalization and Review heard about 720 appeals. Tax Administrator Kep Kepley discussed the number of appeals that might be heard by the State Board of Appeals.

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Commissioner Snowdon discussed five recommendations made by the Board of Equalization and Review.

1. Waive permit fees for tearing down dilapidated buildings. That Board later found out the permit fee is not required.
2. Consider conducting revaluation every four years, which would require the hiring of an additional employee. Mr. Kepley said this method would result in a savings over the long-term because the more the County does in-house the less it would have to rely on a consultant.
3. Study the ETJ because there were zoning conflicts on pieces of property between the County and municipalities with ETJs. Commissioner Snowdon suggested that the County Attorney look at that and make a recommendation.
4. Maintain the current members of the Board of Equalization and Review.
5. Reduce the Schedule of Values adopted for mobile home sites listed as real estate.

Motion was made by Commissioner Snowdon and duly seconded by Vice Chair Shelley authorizing the Tax Administrator to develop figures for the projected cost of a four-year revaluation compared to an eight-year revaluation. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

On item #3, the Board by consensus directed the County Attorney to study the ETJ area and come back with a recommendation.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Shelley and duly seconded by Commissioner Clint Willis to maintain the members of the current Board of Equalization and Review for another year. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

On item #5, the Board by consensus directed the Tax Administrator to bring additional facts and figures to the Board concerning reduced values on mobile home sites listed as real estate.

Mr. Kepley and Ms. Lisa Faulkner of the Tax Office described how the Board of Equalization and Review appeals process worked.

[break at 3:30/meeting resumed at 3:45]

Cooperative Extension Director Cathy Graham distributed information on Farm City Week Celebration, which will be held in conjunction with the John Blue Festival.

Long Range Planning

DSS

Commissioner Clint Willis said that DSS is not in compliance with State regulations in terms of facility needs. He said “every inch of space” at DSS is being used.

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Commissioner Clint Willis said that as a Board, it should revisit the 2001 County government facility assessment study. He said there should be a long-range determination made as to how the governing body would like to solve some of the problems.

County Manager Sauer said he would make the study available to the Board by the October 6, 2003, meeting.

Jail

Jail conditions were discussed, including lack of space and moisture damage.

The Board by consensus directed the County Engineer to conduct an assessment of the Jail's physical facility, including moisture damage.

Commissioner Gholston said she has heard from citizens who complained that the food being served in the Jail is inconsistent with the scheduled menu and that substitutions are frequently used.

The Board by consensus directed the Sheriff to provide the governing body with a 30-day Jail meal menu and an accounting of what was actually served during the same time period.

Scotland County Memorial Library

Director Robert Busko discussed the Library's capital needs.

1. Estimated cost of replacing the carpeting, which is original to the 1967 structure, is \$30,000.
2. The Library Board approved \$34,000 for a new roof, which will come from savings.
3. Estimated cost of replacing the air conditioning system, which is original to the building, is \$25,000.
4. The vendor will no longer support the check-in/check-out automated system in 2004. The current system was installed in 1999. Estimated replacement cost is \$110,000 to \$125,000, and grant funding might be available.

Mr. Busko said the Scotland County Library, one of the smallest in the State, is now in a position of giving books away because there is no room to keep them.

Old Prison Site

The County Manager said the old prison site is available. There have been some inquiries about its future use, but all in the very preliminary stages.

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The Board by consensus agreed to let the State keep the old prison.

Central School

The County Manager said issues continue with vandalism and break-ins. There is a neighborhood group that would like to see the area including Central preserved. There is no strategy or financing for Central at this point.

Commissioner J.D. Willis said it is important that the governing body develop some plan or deadline regarding the disposition of Central School. He suggested that the County look at bids to determine how much it would cost to tear down.

Dr. Graham offered to do a search for possible grants that focus on restoration of historical properties.

Commissioner Jordan said he does not support a move to Central School because it would be viewed as “growing government.”

Commissioner Gholston said that Scotland County would at some point have to resolve its space issues.

The Board by consensus directed the County Manager to see how much it would cost to tear down Central School and to ascertain if anyone has expressed an interest in buying Central School.

Ambulance Replacement

Commissioner J.D. Willis said that he realizes there is a need for a new ambulance based on what he has seen and heard since the budget work sessions. He said money would need to be appropriated so EMS Director Roylin Hammond could begin the purchase process.

Chairman Burns said there is a slight possibility Mr. Hammond might be able to purchase an ambulance through State or Federal funding.

Mr. Hammond said he is not yet sure if the funding earmarked for first responders could be used for an emergency vehicle purchase.

Commissioner J.D. Willis said if Mr. Hammond can't qualify for it, the County should purchase the ambulance.

Motion was made by Commissioner J.D. Willis and duly seconded by Commissioner Snowdon to appropriate funding to purchase an ambulance for EMS providing grant money is not available.

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Mr. Williams suggested that the Board not take any action until Mr. Hammond knows with certainty that grant money is not available for an ambulance purchase. He explained that if funding is appropriated for the purchase, a grant could not be used for a refund.

Commissioner J.D. Willis retracted the motion, and Commissioner Snowdon retracted the second pending a recommendation in a timely fashion from the EMS Director.

Update on Current Events

Mosquito Assessment

Environmental Health Program Coordinator Teddy Locklear provided an update on mosquito complaints and mosquito counts. Preventive measures include distributing larvicide and gambusia minnows and conducting public education sessions.

GOJO

Chairman Burns said things were moving along more slowly than anyone had hoped. Details are being hammered out between GOJO and Abbott. Chairman Burns provided an update on a new incentive agreement with GOJO.

The County Manager said that Inspections Director Tony McQuage has been working closely with the company on methods for retrofitting the building.

Commissioner J.D. Willis said he is concerned about West Point Stevens, and the Board should watch it closely and keep lines of communication open, letting the company know the Board is willing to discuss ways to keep them in the community.

The Board discussed the landfill as an enterprise, how it operates and how it stands financially.

Commissioner Jordan asked about the viability of consolidating communications in the County. The County Manager said he doesn't know if such effort would bring in much savings, although it could result in some efficiencies by overcoming duplications in the dispatch effort.

Trends and Other Items

The County Manager said DSS is seeing more South Carolina residents coming into Scotland County rest homes under the County's Medicaid, which could present some financial burdens.

The County Manager said there is a \$75,000 urgent repair grant available. Adrian Lowery with LRCOG would like authorization to move ahead with an application. A nonrefundable application fee of \$50 is required. The money would be used for small but critical home repairs. There are points to be earned by putting up a \$4,000 local match.

Motion was made by Commissioner Gholston and duly seconded by Commissioner J.D. Willis to apply for the \$75,000 NC Housing Finance Agency Urgent Repair Program grant, which includes a commitment by Scotland County to provide a \$4,000 local match. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

The County Manager said Robeson County invited Scotland County to participate with other counties in a beaver control cost share program. It would involve partially funding the salary of a beaver control professional.

The Board by consensus agreed to table the issue.

The County Manager said the State Building Code Qualification Council has put out an alert requesting help in some of the stricken communities flooded by Hurricane Isabel. Mr. McQuage would likely volunteer. He would volunteer on County time. There is a possibility of reimbursement from disaster relief funds. The Board agreed that being a good neighbor in times like this is important.

“Leading by Results” State Initiative

Commissioner Clint Willis said “Leading by Results” is the result of a six-month study to develop ways to make DSS better, more effective and to possess the ability to do more with less.

The study produced six results to make the community a better place.

1. At-risk children to be safe and healthy in stable environments.
2. Economically disadvantaged children, families and adults to become self-sufficient.
3. Aging and disabled adults to be safe and healthy and live in stable and least restrictive settings.
4. Children in custodial care to become successful adults.
5. Effective community partnerships to understand social issues and prevent social problems.
6. Maximization of resources and achievement of results while maintaining the highest fiscal accountability.

This is about measuring results of all DSS programs to determine their effectiveness. This insures that the money being spent assists clients in becoming more productive when they come out of the system. Commissioner Clint Willis said he believes this is the first initiative nationwide that looks at the system from the bottom up. Scotland is one of 25 counties that will be a pilot in this initiative. The DSS staff would be trained to lead by results.

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Other Items

The Board discussed ways to provide the community with a better understanding of County government, the services it provides and how they are supported through tax dollars. Commissioners discussed conveying that information through the local media, the Scotland County website, town meetings, brochures, advertising and newsletters as supplements. The use of pie charts and penny charts also was discussed.

Motion was made by Commissioner J.D. Willis and duly seconded by Commissioner Snowdon to adjourn. Vote: Motion unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ann W. Kurtzman
Clerk

David L. Burns
Chairman