

*Scotland County Board of Commissioners Midyear Planning Retreat
February 10, 2009, 507 West Covington Street, Laurinburg*

MINUTES

**Scotland County Board of Commissioners
Midyear Planning Retreat, February 10, 2009
507 West Covington Street, Laurinburg NC**

At 1 p.m. Chairman J. D. Willis reconvened the meeting for a midyear planning retreat. Commissioners in attendance: Chairman Willis, Vice Chair Betty Blue Gholston and Commissioners Bob Davis, Guy McCook, Joyce McDow and Clarence McPhatter. Commissioners not in attendance: Commissioner John Alford. Staff in attendance: County Manager Kevin Patterson and Clerk to the Board Ann W. Kurtzman.

Presentation: WestPoint Home Treatment Plant Evaluations

Mr. Chris Thomson of the Wooten Company gave a PowerPoint presentation on the WestPoint Home Treatment Plant Evaluations. The report included the project planning area, project need and cost for both water treatment and wastewater treatment. Mr. Thomson said the demand for water in the region is expected to grow about 27 percent over the next 20 years.

The Commissioners and Mr. Wooten discussed the presentation and the cost of water transmission to communities and municipalities within the region.

County Manager Kevin Patterson said he would contact surrounding counties and municipalities to gauge interest in exploring the project further. Mr. Patterson suggested that a water transmission study also would be a next step in the process.

Tax: Credit Card Restructure Plan

County Manager Patterson said when the Tax Office several years ago began accepting tax payments via credit cards, fees were not charged. Mr. Patterson said it is now permissible for the Tax Department to charge a fee on credit card payments. Mr. Patterson said last year \$200,000 in on-line payments were collected at no cost to the County and \$625,000 in credit/debit card payments were made in the office at a cost to the County of more than \$20,000.

Mr. Patterson asked if the Board wanted the County to subsidize the payment of taxes or put it back on the taxpayer who uses credit/debit cards.

Chairman Willis said he saw no reason to continue to subsidize the payments if it has no impact on the overall collection rate.

Commissioner McCook mentioned that other departments, including Parks and Recreation, are set up to accept credit/debit cards, too.

Mr. Patterson said he would develop a rate structure for credit/debit card payments and bring it back to the Commissioners for review.

Financial Forecast

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Mr. Patterson said the State instituted an across-the-board seven percent cut to make up for a \$1.9 billion budget shortfall. Mr. Patterson said there still are variables that might negatively or positively affect the State's budget situation depending on what is done at the federal level regarding a stimulus package.

Mr. Patterson said locally sales tax collections the first six months were above where they were last year, but the collections are now trending down. Mr. Patterson said last year the County budgeted sales tax as flat. Mr. Patterson projected that the worst case scenario would be sales tax falling short by three percent, or \$400,000.

Chairman Willis said that would cause the County to try and come up with \$400,000 just to pay the school bonds and that would be a dilemma.

Mr. Patterson said the closing of Goody's and Peebles will represent an estimated \$100,000 loss in sales tax revenues, which is figured into the \$400,000. Mr. Patterson said that in the past six months property tax collections are down about 1.5 percent. Mr. Patterson said the County's revenue stream is just catching up to the worst of the economic news and the high in layoffs.

Commissioner McCook said the County might see a reduction in automobile taxes because less people are buying new cars.

Capital Projects

Government Complex – DSS Director Joe Knott said the agency needs at least a 23-000-square-foot expansion, which would include the Commissioners Chamber as part of the expansion. He said USDA loans are available with a reimbursement rate of 54 percent over a 45-year period. Mr. Knott said the Commissioners Chamber could become the central entry area to the building, which would be a joint reception area for Health and DSS. Mr. Knott said any expansion would work to maximize security for the sake of safety. Mr. Knott said a 9,000-square-foot expansion could be done off the side of the building without having to move the road.

Vice Chair Gholston said more space at DSS has been a critical capital need for a while and it is time to get going on a plan.

Speller Building – County Manager Patterson said the Speller Building could become County property once RCC builds its new Scotland campus. Mr. Patterson said the Tax Department could move into the Speller Building, which would free space to move Child Support to the Courthouse.

Chairman Willis said that the Speller Building might just be a "quick fix" and the County should look at long term space solutions and a possible expansion to address needs at DSS. Mr. Patterson commented that regardless, it still would make sense to locate Child Support to the Courthouse.

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The Commissioners by consensus agreed that development of a capital plan to address long term DSS space needs would make the most sense.

EMS – Mr. Patterson said the 911 call center is no longer one telephone and a radio and there is no longer enough space to house two dispatchers at a time. Mr. Patterson said the County might consider an add-on or consider some alternate option.

Mr. Patterson explained that the Annex is still designated as the EOC, which cannot be relocated to the Commissioners Chamber because there is not sufficient power to operate an EOC there. Modifications just to provide the additional power would be costly, said Mr. Patterson.

Parks and Recreation – Mr. Patterson said there is need for additional space at Scotland Place where some employees do not even have offices. He discussed earlier proposals regarding Scotland Place where an expansion of the existing facility would allow for an EOC and a new Commissioners Chamber.

The Commissioners directed the County Manager to gather key Department Heads to review all space needs and develop a plan complete with timeline and capital costs. The Commissioners asked that the capital plan be presented to them during the upcoming budget work sessions.

Library – Mr. Patterson said the Library has \$175,000 in funds available for capital projects that were in place before it became a part of the County. Mr. Patterson said the Library would like to purchase a security system for its book collection at an estimated \$50,000. Mr. Patterson said the Library also would like to purchase a new Bookmobile to replace the current 1988 Bookmobile, which often is in need of repair. He said the Bookmobile price tag is about \$130,000.

Chairman Willis said he saw nothing wrong with the Library making the capital purchases as long as it assumed responsibility for coming up with the difference in cost as well.

Commissioner McDow said the Bookmobile brings an important service to people who are homebound for one reason or another and cannot get out to the rest of the world.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Gholston and duly seconded by Chairman Willis to allow the Library to move forward with its capital goals with the County's blessing. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

The Commissioners took a break. The meeting resumed at 2:45 p.m.

Open Positions

Mr. Patterson said although the Commissioners approved a hiring freeze, the Board agreed to entertain requests as needs arose.

DSS – DSS Director Joe Knott asked the Commissioners to approve the hiring of an Office Assistant IV in Child Support, which has been vacant since November, and to hire an Income

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Maintenance Caseworker II, which would be reclassified from a Social Worker II. Mr. Knott said the reclassification would represent a savings to the County.

Motion was made by Commissioner McPhatter and duly seconded by Commissioner Davis to approve the hiring in DSS of an Office Assistant IV in Child Support and to reclassify a Social Worker II to an Income Maintenance Caseworker II and to hire an Income Maintenance Caseworker II. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Health – Health Director Ron Sapp said four positions currently are vacant but are critical to the operation of the agency. Mr. Sapp asked the Commissioners to consider approving the hiring of a Processing Assistant IV, an LPN II, a PHN III-Quality Assurance Coordinator and a PHN Supervisor I-Maternal/Child Health Supervisor.

Motion was made by Commissioner McPhatter and duly seconded by Commissioner McDow to approve the hiring in the Health Department of a Processing Assistant IV, an LPN II, a PHN III-Quality Assurance Coordinator and a PHN Supervisor I-Maternal/Child Health Supervisor. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Public Buildings – Facilities Manager Jim Blackwell asked the Commissioners to approve two positions, one for a Janitor and one for a Field Technician. Mr. Blackwell said currently three janitors split their time among five buildings. Mr. Blackwell said as it gets closer to spring and softball season there is more of a need for the Field Technician. Mr. Blackwell also requested that Public Buildings be permitted to hire a Foreman, which just recently became vacant.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Gholston and duly seconded by Commissioner McDow to approve the hiring in Buildings and Grounds a Field Technician, a Janitor and a Foreman. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Mr. Blackwell said he will not renew a contracted cleaning service for the Health Department and DSS, which costs \$65,000. Mr. Blackwell said there would be a \$35,000 savings if the County agrees to hire an additional janitor.

Motion was made by Commissioner McCook and duly seconded by Vice Chair Gholston to give the contracted service 30-days notice now so Public Buildings could hire an additional Janitor. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Tax -- Tax Administrator Mary Helen Norton said two positions are open and budgeted. One is for a Tax Appraiser, the other is for a Land Records person, which recently became vacant due to a retirement. Ms. Norton said both positions would be needed soon to adequately staff the upcoming revaluation.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Gholston and duly seconded by Commissioner McPhatter to approve the hiring in the Tax Department of a Tax Appraiser and a Land Records person. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Specific Budget Items and Goals

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EMS Compensation Review – County Manager Patterson explained the need for an EMS Compensation Review. Mr. Patterson said when the State made it a requirement for EMTs and Paramedics to earn degrees, compensation at Scotland County EMS was never adjusted for that. Mr. Patterson said EMS is staffed according to a fluctuating work week which involves working more than 40 hours. Mr. Patterson said the way compensation is currently structured, the hourly rate for EMTs and Paramedics declines the more hours they work. Mr. Patterson said in order to correct that he would look at a number of different scenarios that could be placed in the budget. Mr. Patterson said the estimated cost would be \$200,000.

Chairman Willis said if the County is looking at an additional \$200,000 why wouldn't EMS instead hire some additional people to relieve the workload.

EMS Director Roylin Hammond explained that the only option would be to hire an additional shift of five people.

Mr. Patterson reminded the Board that an additional \$200,000 for the five Jailers required by the State also would have to be worked into the budget.

Vice Chair Gholston questioned whether a five-car rotation in the Office of the Sheriff be suspended just once so the Sheriff could use the funds to fulfill other needs his office might have.

Commissioner McCook asked that an inventory of in-service vehicles be compiled so the Board could see which ones would need to be replaced.

Wagram Recreational Facility – County Manager Patterson reported that the Wagram Recreational facility project is moving slowly.

Chairman Willis said he would get with the mayor of Wagram to discuss what needs to be done to move forward on the project.

County Engineer Jim Blackwell said he would be available to assist in moving the Wagram project along.

Mr. Patterson reminded the Board that the cost of coordinated activities at the Wagram Recreational building would be factored in the 2009-2010 budget.

Tax Rate Goals

County Manager Patterson said he would work toward presenting a budget with a tax rate under \$1.00 as previously requested by the Commissioners. He said based on current economic conditions, it might change what kind of service or level of service the County performs.

Chairman Willis said 99 cents would be the goal. He added that there are numerous variables that might make reaching that goal a challenge, especially if the State freezes or withholds funds

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to the County. Chairman Willis added that if the State does not freeze or withhold funds, the tax rate could come in at 98 cents.

Mr. Patterson said he also hopes to include a cost of living for employees in the budget.

Commissioner Discussion Points

Vice Chair Gholston requested that local contractors rehabilitate homes under the single family rehabilitation grant just received by the County.

Commissioner McPhatter said that is not always possible because certain State requirements contractors must meet prevent that from happening.

The Commissioners also discussed the possibility creating a grant writer position.

County Manager Patterson said that Economic Development Manager Greg Icard will aggressively pursue grants when they become available and that grant writing is part of his job description.

Mr. Patterson said there has been a request for a joint session with the County, City, Airport Commission and Town of Maxton so the possibility of hiring a lobbyist could be explored. The lobbyist would represent the four entities in securing federal grant dollars.

The Commissioners discussed the Community Assistance Grants and the possibility that the Board meet as a whole several times a year to review the requests before individual appropriations are made.

Commissioner McCook suggested that applications be accepted and reviewed during a limited time period a few times a year so agencies making application could come before the Commissioners to discuss the request.

The Commissioners took a break. The meeting resumed at 4:10 p.m.

I73/74 Project

Ms. Janet Robertson, LRCOG Rural Transportation Organization Planner, presented an update on the I73/74 program. Ms. Robertson said I74 through Scotland County remains unfunded although she is still seeking public comment about the I74 corridor and land planning possibilities.

Commissioner McCook said he would ask the Chamber of Commerce to organize a public input session and invite Ms. Robertson to make a presentation.

Closed Session

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Motion was made by Commissioner McCook and duly seconded by Commissioner McPhatter to go into Closed Session held in accordance N.C. General Statute 143-318.11(a)(5) to establish or instruct the staff or agent concerning the negotiation of the price and terms of a contract concerning the acquisition of real property.

OPEN SESSION RESUMED

The Commissioners discussed the Richardson study regarding the proposed expansion to the existing landfill owned and operated by the County.

Motion was made by Chairman Willis and duly seconded by Commissioner McCook to move forward with the landfill expansion and begin negotiations to purchase land that might lead to condemnation proceedings. Vote: Motion unanimously approved.

Motion was made by Commissioner McPhatter and duly seconded by Commissioner McDow to adjourn. Vote: Motion unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at 5 p.m.

Ann W. Kurtzman
Clerk to the Board

J.D. Willis
Chairman