

MINUTES
REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
OF EDGEcombe COUNTY
JANUARY 2, 2024 AT 6:00 P.M.
IN THE JONATHAN FELTON COMMISSIONERS ROOM
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING
TARBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER BY CHAIRMAN LEONARD WIGGINS AT 6:00 P.M.
MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Leonard Wiggins, Chair, Mrs. Viola Harris, Vice-Chair, Mr. Donald Boswell, Rev. E. Wayne Hines, Mrs. Evelyn Powell, Mr. George Thorne and Mr. Ralph Webb.
MEMBERS ABSENT: None.
OTHERS PRESENT: Mr. Eric Evans, County Manager, Mrs. Natalie Bess, Deputy County Manager, Mr. Michael Peters, County Attorney, Mr. Michael Matthews, Assistant County Manager, Mrs. Linda Barfield, CFO and Ms. Frankie Mungo, Clerk to the Board.
2. SAFETY INSTRUCTIONS.
Safety instructions provided by Mrs. Bess.
3. PRAYER.
Prayer provided by Rev. Hines.
4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING PRESENTED FOR APPROVAL.
Rev. Hines moved to approve the minutes of the December 4, 2023 meeting as presented. Mrs. Powell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.
5. PUBLIC HEARING:
 1. Mr. Wiggins called a public hearing to order relative to proposed amendments to the Code of Ordinances.

Mr. Peters read the public notice.

Mr. Evans stated that it has become the Board's practice that when the first Monday falls on a holiday to move the meeting to the Tuesday of the same week. However, our ordinances say at Labor Day, that meeting is to be on the following Monday. The Board recently voted to change the meeting time 6 p.m. The proposed ordinance amendment addresses both. The language states that the meetings will be at 6 p.m. and that any meeting that falls on a holiday will be held on the Tuesday of the same week.

Mr. Wiggins called for public comments. There being none the public hearing was adjourned.

Mr. Boswell moved to approve the amendments as presented. Mrs. Powell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.
6. SCHEDULED APPOINTMENT(S):
 - A. Alan Thompson with Thompson, Price, Scott & Adams, presented the FY-23 Audit.
 - In regards to management estimates of depreciation, management estimates of allowance for doubtful accounts and managements financial disclosures, we were in agreement with all of those.
 - Difficulties encountered in performing the audit encountered no significant difficulties.
 - No uncorrected misstatements.

- No disagreements with Management.
- Representation letter provided by management.
- Other findings or issues.
- Other matters.
- Financial information for 5 years.
- Analysis of fund balance.
- Analysis of revenues.
- Property tax rates and collection percentages.
- Debt analysis.

B. Dr. Mark Cockrell, Executive Director of North East Carolina Preparatory School, presented an update on school performance and planned projects.

- What is a Charter School?
- School report card.
- Highlights.
- 2022-2023 test scores.
- Our Vision, Our Future.
- Agricultural building
- Growth Plan.
- House Bill 219.
- Fiscal responsibility.

Dr Cockrell stated that they will welcome any consideration from the Board to help fulfill their goals. He also answered questions from the Board.

7.

PUBLIC PETITIONS.

Dr. Tracy Phillips, 1109 US Highway 301, Whitakers, stated that she noticed that on the Local Government Commission’s website it is noticeably absent that the County’s audit report is not there, but she is delighted to hear that the audit report was presented this evening. She stated that these reports are instrumental in maintaining transparency and accountability of our taxpayer funds. Transparency upholds the adherence to rules and regulations while insuring that information is easily accessible to those impacted by your budgetary decisions. Edgecombe County leadership, over the last two decades, the county has been grappling with a myriad of challenges. According to the North Carolina Department of Commerce Edgecombe County is classified as economically distressed. Ranked amongst the highest in the State. Since 2018 the LGC has flagged the County as a high-risk unit due to particular concerns about the County’s internal controls and issues with the general fund and the water/sewer fund. These concerns were recently underscored by the state auditor’s report, which shed light on significant financial negligence, resulting in fines and fees incurred by the county taxpayers exceeding over \$250,000. Dr. Phillips stated that it is even more disconcerting to add that deadlines, like the one that she heard we missed this evening on the debt service. It was tardy. The audit report has been consistently late and the deadline has been missed since 2015 when Mr. Evans assumed the role of County Manager. This cavalier approach and this situation compel her to ask when will the Board intervene to address these recurring management performance issues. Decision making appears to lack proactive vision. Utilizing short term solutions to on-going issues and it is evident that it seems to have no insight into the policy impacts, leading to our shrinking tax base and evidence and voter apathy and disillusionment. It has taken a hefty toll on our county residents. These recurring infringements aggravate public distrust of leadership and have amplified skepticism about the commission’s ability to fulfill its duties. Regardless of the upcoming election and several unopposed commissioners’ complacency must not be permitted to set in. Dr. Phillips stated that she implored the Board to the tendency towards non-disclosure and prioritize their responsibilities. These repeated discretions sow seeds of distrust and a perceived indifference towards the well-being of our citizens. Has led to a collapse in confidence. Please remember that your actions and decisions remain under scrutiny. Rest assured we, the taxpayers of Edgecombe County, are watching.

8. OTHER BUSINESS:

A. Approval of budget amendments.

Mr. Boswell moved to approve budget amendments as presented. Mr. Thorne seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

B. Approval of increasing Mileage Reimbursement rate.

Mr. Evans stated that it is the County's practice to follow the standard mileage reimbursement rate set by the Internal Revenue Service. Recently, the IRS issued a notice that it is increasing the rate from 65.5 cents to 67 cents per mile.

Rev. Hines moved to approve the new mileage reimbursement rate of 67 cents as presented. Mrs. Harris seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

C. Approval of approving sign-on and retention bonuses for Social Workers in Child Welfare.

Mr. Evans stated that in the last few years, we have experienced higher than average vacancies in Child Welfare positions in Social Services, especially with Social Worker Investigative/Assessment & Treatment positions. Though Ms. Betty Battle, DSS Director, and her team have done an excellent job in making sure those critical services are provided, the longer we experience such high turnover, the more difficult it becomes to effectively provide those services. Most agencies across the state and nation are experiencing the same challenge. That has prompted counties to employ new strategies to mitigate the problem. Mr. Evans stated that we recently overhauled our Compensation Plan, which included raising salaries across the County. We have already seen the new Compensation Plan positively impact turnover in most of our departments. However, with the Social Worker IAT position, turnover continues to be high. We believe that this is due to the ongoing competition for qualified social workers in the field, as well as the difficulty of the work of that particular position. This position provides the most intensive service of our child welfare positions and often puts the employee in difficult or even threatening circumstances. Mr. Evans stated that one strategy we see many counties now using is sign-on and retention bonuses. From the information Ms. Battle gathered, counties are offering between \$2,000 and \$20,000 for sign-on and retention bonuses. Though the use of such bonuses is relatively new, and therefore, data from large samples is not available to definitively prove its effectiveness, feedback we are receiving shows that it is a strategy worth using. Considering the importance of us addressing the high turnover in Child Welfare, and that 50% of the cost of the bonus is reimbursement from the state which minimizes the cost to the County, he recommended that the Board approve the Sign-on and Retention Bonus policy and authorize staff to develop Sign-on and Retention agreements consistent with the policy. Mr. Evans noted that at their last meeting, there was consensus support from the Human Services Board for the use of sign-on and retention bonuses.

Mrs. Harris moved to approve the Sign-on and Retention Bonuses policy as presented. Mrs. Powell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

D. Approval of acceptance of Grant Award for Eastpointe.

Mr. Evans stated that the County has been awarded a \$60,000 grant from Eastpointe through the County Initiative for the Impact of Opioid Use. These funds will be used to purchase critical equipment for our Community Paramedic program listed in the grant agreement.

Mrs. Powell moved to approve the acceptance of this grant award with its accompanying project ordinance. Mr. Boswell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

E. Approval of Health Department fees.

Mr. Evans presented the proposed Health Department fee for PCV 20, a pneumonia vaccine, which is replacing PCV 13. The proposed fee is \$288, which includes the cost

of the vaccine itself and the cost to administer it. At their last meeting, the Human Services Board unanimously approved recommending the new fee.

Mr. Boswell moved to approve the fee as presented. Rev. Hines seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

F. Approval of Bad Debt Write-off for Health Department.

Mr. Evans stated that the Health Department's Bad Debt Write Off Policy states that a patient's account will be handled as Bad Debt when there has been no activity on the account for more than six months. This does not mean that there will be no further efforts to collect the debt. In fact, if there is any new activity on the account, for example the patient presents at the Health Department for services, then the account is reactivated. This action is an accounting method whereas the written off debt no longer shows on our books as a receivable.

Mrs. Harris moved to approve as presented. Mr. Webb seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

G. Approval of acceptance of Golden Leaf grant for Kingsboro Infrastructure Project.

Mr. Evans stated that Golden LEAF awarded Carolinas Gateway Partnership a grant in the amount of \$7,537,500.00 to construct water and wastewater lines, road access improvements and conduct a groundwater study at the Kingsboro Mega-site. A portion of these funds were to extend wastewater to the Training Center. However, with the Training Center funds being rescinded, Golden LEAF funds remained in the project. After discussions with Golden LEAF, they have agreed to repurpose the remaining \$3,502,645.77 to construct a waterline extension along Leonard Wiggins Parkway and that Edgecombe County would be the grantee moving forward.

Mrs. Powell moved to approve the acceptance of a revised Grantee Acknowledgement and Agreement from Golden LEAF to Edgecombe County in the amount of \$3,502,645.77. Mr. Thorne seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

H. Approval of amendments to the Compensation Plan.

Mr. Evans stated that as we have continued to review our new Compensation Plan, we have identified additional corrections and additions to be made. He presented a summary of those changes, which corresponds with the number on the draft updates.

Mr. Boswell moved to approve the job description for the Financial Reporting Administrator and the updated Compensation Plan Ordinance as presented. Mrs. Powell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

9. APPOINTMENTS:

A. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.

Mrs. Harris moved to appoint Ms. Tyronda Whitaker to replace Mr. Calvin Adkins, who resigned, as Board-at-Large. Rev. Hines seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

10. AFTERLISTS AND RELEASES FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL.

Mr. Boswell moved to approve the afterlists and releases as presented. Rev. Hines seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

11. CONTRACTS FOR REVIEW AND/OR APPROVAL.

Mr. Boswell moved to approve as presented. Mrs. Powell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

12. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS FOR REVIEW.***Received***

A. Water and Sewer update.

- B. Monthly Financial Summary presented by Mrs. Linda Barfield.
- C. Department of Social Services Celebration of Efforts in Foster Care.

13. MANAGER'S REPORT.***Received***

- A. Update on Getting Off the Lists initiative.
- B. Major events and updates.
- C. Workforce Development Indicators.
- D. TDA financial report.
- E. Update on Vehicle Purchase for the Sheriff's Office
- F. Save the date: Commissioners Retreat, March 11, 2024, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Location TBD
- G. NCAAC District Meeting – January 22nd at 12 p.m. in Wilson.
- H. Farm City Breakfast – January 7th at 7:30 a.m. at the Ag. Center.

14. COMMISSIONERS' REPORT.

Mr. Boswell thanked the Board and Mr. Evans for attending his mother-in-law's funeral (Betty Lewis)

15. ATTORNEY'S REPORT.

None.

16. CLOSED SESSION.

Rev. Hines moved to go into closed session to discuss:

- A. Economic Development. [N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a)(4)]
- B. Personnel. [N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a)(4)]

Mr. Boswell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

Mrs. Powell moved to go out of closed session and resume the regular meeting. Mr. Thorne seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

17. REV. HINES MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. MRS. POWELL SECONDED THE MOTION, WHICH CARRIED BY UNANIMOUS VOTE.

Approved February 5, 2024.


Frankie Mungo, Clerk to the Board