

COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Monday, February 3, 2003

7:30 P.M.

The Honorable Columbus County Commissioners met on the above stated date and at the above stated time in the Dempsey B. Herring Courthouse Annex Building located at 112 West Smith Street, Whiteville, North Carolina, for their regular scheduled meeting on the first Monday.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

C.E. "Gene" Wilson, **Chairman**
 Bill Memory, **Vice Chairman**
 David L. Dutton, Jr.
 Godwin, Kipling
 Sammie Jacobs
 Amon E. McKenzie
 Lynwood Norris

APPOINTEES PRESENT:

Billy Joe Farmer, **County Administrator**
 James E. Hill, Jr., **County Attorney**
 Darren L. Currie, **Assistant County Administrator**
 June B. Hall, **Clerk to Board**

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:

At 7:30 P.M., Chairman Wilson called the meeting to order. The invocation was delivered by Commissioner Amon E. McKenzie. Everyone in attendance stood and pledged allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

CHAF PROGRAM UPDATE:

Floyd Adams, The Adams Company, Incorporated, presented the following update on the Columbus County CHAF Program.

Columbus County Summary Sheet

CHAF Program

Previous
02-17-03

TOTAL HOUSES				491		
Houses Inspected				491		
Replacement			290			288
Repair			201			203
Repair Work			201			
Work Write-up	0				0	
Bids Complete, Not Awarded	0				0	
Board Awarded, No Construction	40				47	
Title Opinion NOT Requested		0				0
Waiting on Title Opinion		3				7
Waiting on Prom. Not/D.O.T.		18				15
Waiting on Contractor		19				25
Under Construction	30				30	
Complete	131				126	
Replacement Work			290			
Work Write-up	2				2	
Board Awarded, No Construction	62				66	
Title Opinion NOT Requested		11				11
Waiting on Title Opinion		22				24
N.O.E. Not Sent		15				13
Waiting on Client		14				18
Under Construction	79				78	
Complete	147				142	
Not Visited				0	0	

Legal Work						
Total Titles NOT Requested	11					11
Total Titles Requested	480					480
Titles Requested, Not Complete	25					31
Preliminary Title Complete	67					64
Prom.Note/Deed of Trust Requested, Not Signed	59					58
Prom.Note/Deed of Trust Recorded	329					327

Floyd Adams announced that notification had been received that Columbus County has been awarded a seven hundred thousand and 00/100 (\$700,000.00) dollars preliminary Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for Concentrated Needs funds. This will entail three (3) areas as follows: the Pine Circle Area, Henry Jones, Sr. Road Area and an extension to a county water line.

ANIMAL CONTROL - UTILIZATION OF VACANT ANIMAL SHELTER:

Pauline Dietrich, Columbus Humane Society, Incorporated, addressed the Board regarding the possible leasing of the vacant Columbus County Animal Shelter at a nominal yearly fee. She stated the following:

1. We would utilize this building to house adoptable animals;
2. We would provide spaying, neutering and the necessary shots needed;
3. The animals we house would be in limited numbers;
4. Our plans are to expand the facility to house more animals;
5. We presently have ninety-eight (98) animals that will be spayed or neutered; and
6. Our ultimate goal is to limit the animal population in Columbus County.

Commissioner McKenzie asked Ms. Dietrich after you have kept these animals for a reasonable length of time, what do you do? Ms. Dietrich replied stating that the time frame is unlimited. We are advocating a no-kill facility.

Commissioner Jacobs asked Ms. Dietrich how can you afford to house these animals. Ms. Dietrich replied stating they are receiving donations, they are asking for membership fees and hopefully would be able to obtain grants in the future.

Commissioner McKenzie asked Ms. Dietrich if there was any other facility like the one she was proposing in the State? Ms. Dietrich replied stating there is a number of facilities across the State of North Carolina. We are not asking for any money from Columbus County. We are only asking for a chance to provide a no-kill facility and to keep the four thousand two hundred (4,200) animals from being gassed each year.

Commissioner Jacobs asked if their intention was to eliminate the four thousand two hundred (4,200) animals from being gassed each year and was this a realistic goal? Ms. Dietrich replied stating that was their main goal and it may or may not be realistic but they would like to attempt to accomplish this goal.

Commissioner Godwin asked Ms. Dietrich if their intention was to continue the Foster Program while doing this and if they had liability to cover them? Ms. Dietrich replied stating they did not have the necessary liability coverage now but would have to obtain such and would have to ask the State to inspect the facility.

Commissioner Godwin asked Ms. Dietrich what their time frame was since we had received other requests to utilize this vacant building? Ms. Dietrich replied stating their time frame was five (5) years.

Commissioner Memory asked Ms. Dietrich did they need this building for their facility and a foster home? Ms. Dietrich replied stating they did not. They would find foster homes away from the facility.

Commissioner Wilson stated we have received other requests from County departments that

desperately need the space and if we have to pay for this space elsewhere, we will have to pay eleven and 00/100 (\$11.00) dollars per square foot for rent.

Commissioner Godwin asked if this organization was non-profit and tax-exempt. Ms. Dietrich replied by stating yes.

Commissioner Jacobs made a motion to take this matter under advisement, seconded by Commissioner McKenzie. The motion so carried.

DREAM CENTER PRESENTATION:

Renee Steele, Project Coordinator for the Columbus County Housing Needs Program, through the Dream Center, made the following presentation to the Board regarding the severe housing needs in Columbus County accompanied by a nicely prepared package with statistical information.

1. We have been awarded a Strategic Planning Grant for a study to be done regarding the housing needs within Columbus County.
2. In this study we have discovered that over fifty (50%) percent of the residents in Columbus County are living in sub-standard housing.

Chairman Wilson asked Ms. Steele if she had discussed this matter with Jackie Roseboro with the Habitat for Humanity Society which has been looking for an eligible client to build a house for? Ms. Steele replied by stating no she had not.

Commissioner McKenzie asked Ms. Steele if this was a random survey or if they had targeted certain areas? Ms. Steele replied stating they hired six (6) people who were familiar with the area to do the surveys.

Chairman Wilson asked if the survey had been done in rural areas or all over the County? Ms. Steele replied stating they survey had been done over all the areas.

Commissioner Godwin asked Ms. Steele what the next step was? Ms. Steele replied stating the next step was to find funding agents to help and this was one to two (1-2) years out.

TAX DEPARTMENT - TAX INFORMATION/INTERNET ACCESS:

Richard Gore, Columbus County Tax Administrator, requested the Board to grant permission for routine tax information to be made available to a hand-picked group of people, possible twenty-five (25), for testing purposes to determine if the system they now have could accommodate this demand. The accessible information would be no more than what information they could obtain if they visited the Columbus County Tax Office.

Commissioner McKenzie stated he had a problem with the statement of hand-picked group of people and he would need more information to be convinced of the need.

Commissioner Jacobs asked if this would be limited access? Mr. Gore replied stating yes it would be limited access.

Commissioner Memory asked if this would be free access for the test run? Mr. Gore replied stating it would be free for the test run.

Commissioner Jacobs asked how long would this test run be in force? Mr. Gore replied stating it would be for two (2) months. I think in this time frame we should be able to tell if the system we now have would handle the flow of work.

James E. Hill, Jr., Columbus County Attorney, stated he now has a password for Brunswick County Tax Office and Register of Deeds Office which he utilizes to find the information he needs in lieu of physically visiting these locations.

Commissioner Dutton stated that the number of hits (number of times the system is being utilized) would determine the amount of fees charged to the outside sources who use the system.

Commissioner Godwin asked Mr. Gore if this information available would be no more than what information they could obtain if they would visit the Tax Office? Mr. Gore replied stating yes.

Commissioner McKenzie made a motion for Richard Gore, Columbus County Tax Administrator to establish a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) he would use, and to meet with Billy Joe Farmer, Columbus County Administrator to discuss and then bring the results back to the Board for further discussion.

PUBLIC HEARING - NAKINA FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT:

Jerry Avery, Columbus County Fire Marshal, is requesting the Board to set a public hearing date for the Nakina Fire and Rescue Department for the purpose of establishing a fire tax district on April 3, 2003 at 7:30 P.M., at the Nakina Fire and Rescue Department.

Commissioner Dutton made a motion for a Public Hearing date to be set for April 3, 2003, at 7:30 P.M., at the Nakina Fire and Rescue Department, seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

PROCLAMATION - VOCATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK FEBRUARY 8 - 15, 2003:

Commissioner Godwin made a motion to adopt the following Vocational Education Week Proclamation February 8 - 15, 2003, seconded by Commissioner Jacobs. The motion so carried.

**PROCLAMATION
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK, FEBRUARY 8-15, 2003**

WHEREAS, the American Vocational Association has designated the week of February 8-15, 2003 as Vocational Education Week; and

WHEREAS, vocational education supplies our country with a strong, well-trained work force, which enhances productivity in business and industry and protects America's leadership in the international marketplace; and

WHEREAS, vocational education serves individual citizens by enabling them to find satisfying careers that suit their own skills and interest, by providing technical skills that let them excel in their chosen careers, and by teaching leadership skills that serve them on the job, at home and in the community; and

WHEREAS, vocational education enhances high school students' education by offering practical, meaningful application of basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics, thus improving the quality of their education, motivating those at risk of dropping out, and giving all students the potential to become leaders in their fields and in their communities; and

WHEREAS, vocational education stimulates the growth and vitality of Columbus County's businesses and industries and those of the entire nation by preparing workers for the occupations forecast to experience the largest growth in the next decade; and

WHEREAS, a strong vocational education program planned and carried out by trained vocational educators is vital to the future economic development of our community and the well being of its citizens.

NOW THEREFORE, the Columbus County Board of Commissioners hereby proclaims February 8-15, 2003, as "VOCATIONAL EDUCATION WEEK" in Columbus County, and urges all citizens to become familiar with the services and benefits offered by the vocational education programs in this community and to support and participate in these programs as necessary to enhance their individual work skills and productivity.

Adopted this 3rd day of February, 2003.

**Columbus County Board of Commissioners
/s/ C. E. Wilson, Chairman**

Attested By:
June B. Hall, Clerk to Board

AUDIT PRESENTATION:

Alan Thompson, Certified Public Accountant for Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams and Company, P.A., presented the Financial Statements and a Management Letter for Columbus County, North Carolina bearing date of June 30, 2002, with the following comments. Columbus County has received an unqualified opinion and approved by the Local Government Commission.

In the management letter, we noted the following items that should enhance your internal control structure and reporting:

1. Because of the rapid expansion of the water systems the system of internal control needs to be upgraded to ensure the long-term fiscal soundness of the system.
2. For the past several years, the overall fund balance in the General Fund had declined. However, the current year reflected an increase of \$2,003,126. The board and staff should be applauded for their efforts. The rising costs of Medicare and the capital needs of the county should cause the county to be cautious and prudent in the future with the current economic environment.
3. The departments that handle cash in all location should have all internal controls monitored and spot internal audits performed to ensure compliance. We have discussed this with the county's administrative staff.
4. Every receipt and source document should be automatically renumbered with no overriding capability. Care should be taken to ensure no one person in an outlying department has total control of any one portion of an accounting cycle.
5. It is critical to continue to monitor collections of all types in the current economic environment as A/R could easily become uncollectible.
6. We do urge the county to continue to make all necessary preparation for GASB 34.

Mr. Alan Thompson stated that Columbus County was in a sound position financially and that cash and investments had increased.

Commissioner Godwin asked Mr. Thompson if the interpretation he understood was correct as follows:

1. The water districts need to be uniform; and
2. Columbus County is in need of centralized purchasing.

Mr. Alan Thompson replied stating that the interpretation was correct.

Commissioner McKenzie mad a motion to accept this report, seconded by Commissioner Memory. The motion so carried.

STATE EMERGENCY PLANNING COMMITTEE APPROVAL:

John Moore, Emergency Services Director, is requesting the Board approve the list submitted for the State Emergency Planning Committee. This list will be kept on file in the Administration Office and the Emergency Management Office. Commissioner Dutton made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

SOLID WASTE - APPROVAL OF \$25.00 SERVICE CHARGE:

Chuck Stanley, Columbus County Solid Waste Officer, is requesting Board approval of a twenty-five and 00/100 (\$25.00) dollars service charge on trash receptacles to compensate for the time and expense incurred by Columbus County while investigating a claim that ultimately is found to be fraudulent.

After discussion among the Board members, Commissioner Godwin stated the form that had been presented to the Board needed to be reworded in some areas.

James E. Hill, Jr., Columbus County Attorney, stated this form needed to be incorporated into the County Ordinance for Management of Solid Wastes.

Commissioner McKenzie made a motion to approve with the necessary change in wording, seconded by Commissioner Memory. The motion so carried.

RECESS REGULAR SESSION and enter into COLUMBUS COUNTY WATER and SEWER DISTRICT V AUTHORITY BOARD MEETING:

At 8:29 P.M., Commissioner Memory made a motion to recess regular session and enter into a Columbus County Water and Sewer District V Authority Board Meeting, seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

This information will be recorded in the Columbus County Water and Sewer District V Authority Board Meeting Minute Book.

ADJOURN COLUMBUS COUNTY WATER and SEWER DISTRICT V AUTHORITY BOARD MEETING and resume REGULAR SESSION:

At 8:35 P.M., Commissioner Norris made a motion to adjourn the Columbus County Water and Sewer District V Authority Board Meeting and resume Regular Session, seconded by Commissioner Jacobs. The motion so carried.

NORTH CAROLINA FOREST SERVICE UPDATE:

Jamie Ward, County Ranger, North Carolina Division of Forest Service made, the following presentation to the Board.

1. Invited everyone that would like to come visit the County Headquarters located on NC 410, 3 miles south of Chadbourn.
2. Here is the brief summary of the accomplishments of the Columbus County Staff:
 - A. Fire Control;
 - B. Forest Management;
 - C. Forest Protection; **and**
 - D. Information and Education.
3. Due to the lack of funds, our services have been cut as follows:
 - A. Availability to the public due to the fact we must take compensation time before the end of they calendar year and they have eliminated the part-time positions;
 - B. Elimination of the position at the Nakina Fire Tower; **and**
 - C. We do not provide any free fire line plowing as we did before.

PUBLIC HEARING DATE REQUESTED - RIEGEL RIDGE FLOOD PLAIN VARIANCE:

William Drietzler is requesting the Board to establish a date for a Public Hearing for the proposed Riegel Ridge Flood Plain Variance.

Commissioner Godwin asked if William Drietzler had been notified that the Board had decided to not have a Public Hearing until the FEMA Flood Maps had been received.

Darren Currie, Assistant County Administrator, replied stating that this Public Hearing would be used as part of the information gathering package.

Commissioner Jacobs made a motion to rescind the motion made on December 18, 2002 to postpone the Public Hearing until after the FEMA Flood Maps had been received, seconded by Commissioner Dutton. The following vote was taken: Ayes - 5, Nays - 2. The motion so carried.

Commissioner Jacobs made a motion to schedule the Public Hearing date for the Riegel Ridge Flood Plain Variance, as part of the information gathering package, to be March 17, 2003, starting at 7:00 P.M. and ending at 8:00 P.M., in the Dempsey B. Herring Courthouse Annex, 112

West Smith Street, Whiteville, North Carolina. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Norris. The following vote was taken: Ayes - 5, Nays - 2. The motion so carried.

PUBLIC HEARING DATE REQUESTED - WATERSHED PROTECTION ORDINANCE CHANGES:

Darren Currie, Assistance County Administrator, is requesting the Board establish a date for a Public Hearing to incorporate changes and amendments to the Watershed Protection Ordinance as required by the North Carolina General Statutes. Commissioner Dutton made a motion to establish the Public Hearing date for the purpose of incorporating the changes and amendments to the Watershed Protection Ordinance for March 17, 2003, at 6:45 P.M. at the Dempsey B. Herring Courthouse Annex, Whiteville, North Carolina. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS:

Tax Refunds and Releases:

Commissioner Norris made a motion to delete the Tax Refunds and Releases, seconded by Commissioner Dutton. After discussion was held regarding this, Commissioner Norris withdrew his motion to delete the Tax Refunds and Releases, seconded by Commissioner Dutton. The motion to withdraw the Tax Refunds and Releases so carried. Commissioner Dutton made a motion to table the Tax Refunds and Releases pending verification by Chuck A. Stanley, Columbus County Solid Waste Officer, seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

RECESS REGULAR SESSION and enter into CLOSED SESSION:

At 9:23 P.M., Commissioner Norris made a motion to recess Regular Session and enter into Closed Session in accordance with N.C.G.S. §143-318.11, seconded by Commissioner Jacobs. The motion so carried.

No official action was taken.

ADJOURN CLOSED SESSION and resume REGULAR SESSION:

At 10:29 P.M., Commissioner Norris made a motion adjourn Closed Session and resume Regular Session, seconded by Commissioner Jacobs. The motion so carried.

COMMENTS:

Elra and Gertrude Spaulding Park:

James E. Hill, Jr., Columbus County Attorney, stated he had received information regarding a Lease Agreement for the Elra and Gertrude Spaulding Park and requested the Board's direction on this. Commissioner Jacobs made a motion to allow James E. Hill, Jr., County Attorney to proceed with the necessary paperwork, seconded by Commissioner Memory. The motion so carried.

RECESS MEETING:

At 10:33 P.M., Commissioner Godwin made a motion to recess this meeting until Tuesday, February 4, 2003, 7:00 P.M., to be held in the regular meeting place, seconded by Commissioner Dutton. The motion so carried.
