

**COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS****Monday, June 23, 2003****6:00 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 the purpose of concluding their regular scheduled meeting recessed on Monday, June 16, 2003.

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

C.E. "Gene" Wilson, **Chairman**  
 Bill Memory, **Vice-Chairman**  
 David L. Dutton, Jr.  
 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**  
 Gail E. Edwards, **Deputy County Clerk**

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:**

Kip Godwin

**APPOINTEES ABSENT:**

June B. Hall

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:**

At 6:00 P.M., Chairman Wilson called the meeting to order and delivered the invocation. Everyone in attendance stood and pledged allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America. Chairman Wilson then made a recommendation to the Board that Teresa Smith be appointed to the Long Term Care Advisory Committee. Commissioner Sammie Jacobs made a motion to appoint Ms. Smith, seconded by Commissioner Dutton. The motion so carried.

**Agenda Item #3: WATER ISSUES DISCUSSION:**

Commissioner McKenzie advised that he would lead the water issues discussion because he has many issues and concerns. Commissioner McKenzie advised that at the current time water hook up fees are \$400.00 and he made a recommendation for a new fee of \$275.00 due to the fact we now have mandatory hook-ups. Commissioner McKenzie further advised that this would help alleviate some of the pressure on the customers that now have to hook-up. He advised that he has a love and compassion for the people and since we are imposing mandatory hook-ups, we should reduce the cost. He further advised that he got the \$275.00 figure from a previous meeting. It could be more or less, but that is his recommendation. He also advised that others have already paid the \$400.00 and his recommendation for that is that we give those customers a \$100.00 credit for future water bills. Chairman Wilson asked if anyone had any discussion.

Commissioner Memory advised he had some questions and asked County Administrator Billy Joe Farmer how many people did he think would be tapping on to the system in Districts II and III. Mr. Farmer advised about 1200, 600 per each district. Commissioner Memory estimated that 1200 people at \$100.00 would be a \$120,000.00 cost to the County and asked where we would get those funds. Commissioner McKenzie replied that it was just a recommendation that we charge customers \$275.00 instead of the \$400.00. Commissioner Memory then asked Mr. Farmer if we had a contract yet, or if it had been placed out for bid. Mr. Farmer advised that we have a timeline now, and the bid opening will be July 16, 2003 and we will not know the cost until that time. Commissioner McKenzie reiterated that he wanted the Commissioners to reduce the cost for the customers in some way. Commissioner Jacobs then asked what would happen if the taps cost \$450.00 to \$500.00, where would that put the County financially. Commissioner McKenzie then advised that these two districts have had many problems and he gets five to six calls per day concerning paying the \$400.00 and the costs of running the lines to the road. He added that many people cannot afford these costs. Commissioner Dutton then asked again about the \$100.00. Commissioner McKenzie then advised there has been a lot of concern about people who have already paid the \$400.00 and asked that rather than giving them money back that they receive a \$100.00 credit toward their bills. Commissioner Dutton then asked about the people who paid the \$100.00 fee but have no building on their property and asked how or when that and other issues are going to be addressed. Commissioner McKenzie replied that he was under the

impression that if no one lived at the residence we were not charging them for water. Commissioner Dutton again advised that these issues need to be addressed immediately. Commissioner Jacobs replied that if we give people a \$100.00 credit then others would be asking about their credit. Commissioner McKenzie replied that was just his recommendation. Commissioner Dutton advised that we should wait to find out what it is going to cost first to be fair about it. Commissioner Jacobs also advised that we must be financially secure also. Mr. Farmer also advised that the water rates for the next twelve months are based on the way things were at that point; the figures have been calculated for the budget based on the \$400.00 fee and the amount of revenue that we calculated will fall short so we will need to amend the rates to cover the revenues. Commissioner Memory then questioned the issue of people who live off the road, and asked are they going to have to hook up? Mr. Farmer replied that is up to the Board.

Commissioner Memory asked again at what distance are people not going to be required to hook up to the system. Commissioner McKenzie advised that it is the customers' responsibility to hook up from the house to the meter and each house has a meter. Mr. Farmer advised we would run a line if it was economically feasible and normally we would set the meter at the right of way and the property owner gets it to their house from there. Commissioner Memory then advised that these are some of these things that we have to have standards set up for. Commissioner Dutton advised that there are some people that live a quarter of a mile off of the road and we will have to draw some limits. Mr. Farmer also advised that there is also a pressure issue; you cannot run very far without losing PSI. Commissioner McKenzie also advised we are going to have to assist them and make some provisions since we have made it mandatory and he has a compassion for people. Commissioner Memory advised that all seven have a compassion for people. Commissioner Jacobs added that they all have a compassion for people but we also have a fiscal responsibility to the budget adopted. Commissioner McKenzie also advised they have the authority to amend things and he and Chairman Wilson are experiencing problems right now and it is not easy. Mr. Farmer advised this boils down to a policy decision of the Board as to where the money to pay these costs will be allocated from, as there will not be any reduced expenditure to the County. Mr. Farmer added it is really up to the Board to decide if we drop some or raise some or vice-versa, then give staff direction and we will do it. Commissioner McKenzie asked if at some point we could readjust that. Mr. Farmer advised that it was calculated out on a twelve-month period based on a certain rate and we also calculated out the connections coming out for 8/12ths of the year. We can always amend what we are doing but we pretty much calculated this as conservative as we could to start with because we knew the people could just stand so much, so if anything, we're probably a little on the conservative end. Commissioner Memory asked if there were any funds left in either Districts II or III? Mr. Farmer advised no. Commissioner McKenzie asked if they had to appropriate funds initially to do this, could it be done. Mr. Farmer advised if the Board appropriated the funds from the general fund and transferred it into the water funds to pay for the taps, you could do that. The down side to that is the people in other districts who don't have water now or are in town would be paying part of this. Again, that is a policy decision. Commissioner Memory asked if the water taps could be done for less than \$400.00. Mr. Farmer advised it would be nice, but when they are not lined up then we are probably paying more money, back to back the cheapest we saw was \$218.00 and the most expensive was over \$700.00. They averaged to around \$400.00 and Mr. Farmer does not expect to do any better than that on this because we have a few here and a few there and that will drive the cost up. They will also have to bore under the road for some, they have to work around fiber optics, which they have to dig around, and there are long taps that have to be made which will also increase the expense. Commissioner McKenzie asked how he knows all of that. Chairman Wilson then made a suggestion that since the bids will be opened on July 16, 2003, on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003, we have a Water District II and a Water District III special meeting. Commissioner Norris made a motion to have the meeting on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2003 at 6:00 P.M. and Commissioner Jacobs seconded the motion. The motion so carried.

#### **Agenda item #4: CONSTRUCTION ISSUES DISCUSSION:**

Chairman Wilson thanked Mr. Frank Ballard of Ballard Architects, AAI, Incorporated, for waiting patiently. While Mr. Ballard was setting up, Mr. Farmer advised he had asked Mr. Ballard to present three scenarios to the Board to see which one would be the best for the Board. Mr. Ballard then presented to the Board the following schemes for the grocery store and the courthouse along with the numbers for each.

Scheme A- The existing courthouse with the same basic floor plan adding in GIS and ITS departments. Each floor is over 10,000 square feet. This equates to about \$47.00 per square foot and updates the restrooms. This comes to about \$470,000.00. The architect's fee would be ten percent of the construction cost. Monies that have been paid up to date to do these studies would be subtracted from the fee. The architect's fee includes the design, producing the construction documents, paying for all of the engineering fees, and everything associated with the job such as bidding the job out, the administrative end of it. A Columbus County contractor would also be used. Scheme A will take approximately sixteen months to complete.

Scheme B- Renovation of the Hills grocery store to become the Tax Office, Register of Deeds, and Purchasing Department. There is about 15,000 square feet over there. He has indicated parking and landscaping on the scheme. This scheme includes doubling the size of the vault the register of deeds has now and tripling the size of the vault the Tax office has now.

The vaults will also be fire proof. He also showed an enlarged floor plan with a spot for every employee. This also includes public toilets with handicap facilities. There are three ways out of the building. All of the mapping and ITS would be close to the Register of Deeds. There is also plenty of room for an office in Purchasing. He estimated \$47.00 per square foot which comes to about \$705,000.00. His fee would be 7.5 percent and again the money paid for the studies would be taken off of the top. He estimated it will take about sixteen months to complete.

Scheme C- Turning grocery store into a two-story complex. The first thing to do is take the whole roof out and put in a new second floor. It would have to have new electrical, plumbing, etc. This picks up the same type of rhythm as the courthouse square. This would be a 27,000 square foot facility and would be about \$85.00 per square foot, which would be about \$2,295,000.00. He advised his fee would be 8.5 percent and that would be about \$195,000.00. This would include approximately four courtrooms per floor. He estimates it will take about two years to complete this.

Mr. Ballard advised these are estimates he has come up with, and he does not know exactly how much until it is put out to bid. The biggest thing he advised not to do is to go into the project without the money. He then asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner Memory asked what was in the budget. Mr. Farmer advised around \$300,000.00. Mr. Farmer also advised that unofficially Irma McPherson had advised that there would be no funding for trying to redo the existing courthouse, but that we would be eligible for funding from another location. She has come here and gone through the existing courthouse. Attorney Jim Hill advised we could go to outside funding. Mr. Farmer advised that she said the condition of the courthouse and trying to use it for such is not readily expandable for it to do what we need it to do. She advised him we could put in an official request, but unofficially she felt it would not be funded. Another location would probably be funded.

Chairman Wilson asked Mr. Hill his opinion of the two story courthouse-how many years would it be sufficient? Mr. Hill replied less than the remainder of his practice lifetime. Chairman Wilson asked about 25 years, Mr. Hill replied that it would not be that long. Mr. Farmer asked what if this building (Commissioners' Chambers) was included. Mr. Hill advised that this building could be used for office spaces. Chairman Wilson then asked if there were any other questions for Mr. Ballard. With no further questions, Chairman Wilson thanked him for his presentation.

#### **Agenda item #5: BUDGET AMENDMENTS:**

The first budget amendment was for RSVP in the amount of \$2000.00. Commissioner McKenzie advised this is funding for RSVP. He advised that RSVP helped out the County last year. RSVP also ran out of money last year and many volunteers have worked on their own and are still volunteering. This budget amendment is to help offset some of that expense incurred during that time frame. By April of this year, they had exhausted all of their funds for travel, they have not been compensated for their travel. That is one of their incentives that we are giving them. He further advised that if we have a little extra we should assist them. Chairman Wilson asked for a motion to approve. Commissioner McKenzie made the motion to approve, there was no second. Motion died for lack of a second.

The second budget amendment was for a Homeland Security Grant. The motion to approve was made by Commissioner Jacobs with a second by Commissioner Memory. The motion so carried.

Chairman Wilson then advised this was the end of the agenda and asked if anyone had any comments. Commissioner McKenzie stated that he would like for the Board to reconsider the budget amendment for RSVP for reasons he fore stated. He advised this was an opportunity to give back to the senior citizens giving their time who work so diligently in the County. Commissioner Jacobs advised that we have turned down a lot of requests in the past. Chairman Wilson advised that other agencies do not get extra compensation. Commissioner McKenzie then asked was there a second to his motion. No second was made. Motion died for lack of a second. Commissioner McKenzie asked that the record reflect that \$2000.00 of his income this year be deducted and put into RSVP.

Chairman Wilson then asked if anyone else had anything to bring before the Board. No response was received.

**Agenda item #6: ADJOURNMENT:**

At 7:07 P.M., Commissioner Norris made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Bill Memory. The motion so carried.

**APPROVED:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
GAIL E. EDWARDS, Deputy Clerk to Board

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
C.E. WILSON, Chairman