

**COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BOARD RETREAT
Tuesday, March 28, 2017
4:00 P.M.**

The Honorable Columbus County Commissioners met on the above stated date and at the above stated time at Southeastern Community College, 4564 Chadbourn Highway, Whiteville, North Carolina, T-Building, Room 120, for the purpose of conducting the annual Board Retreat, which was duly scheduled at a regular meeting, facilitated by Neil Emory, NCACC Outreach Associate, and Patrice Roesler, NCACC Deputy Director.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

James E. Prevatte, **Chairman**
Amon E. McKenzie, **Vice Chairman** (Arrived: 4:21 P.M.)
Giles E. Byrd (Arrived: 4:15 P.M.)
P. Edwin Russ
Trent Burroughs (Arrived: 4:47 P.M.)
Ricky Bullard
Charles T. McDowell

APPOINTEES PRESENT:

William S. Clark, **County Manager**
Mike Stephens, **County Attorney**
June B. Hall, **Clerk to Board**

OTHERS PRESENT:

Neil Emory, NCACC Outreach Associate
Patrice Roesler, NCACC Deputy Director

Agenda Item #1: BOARD RETREAT CALLED to ORDER and OPENING COMMENTS:

At 4:07 P.M., Chairman James E. Prevatte called the March 28, 2017 Columbus County Board of Commissioners Board Retreat to order. Chairman Prevatte thanked the Commissioners for taking the time out of their busy schedules to help set the priority of needs for the next year.

Agenda Item #2: INTRODUCTIONS:

Patrice Roesler stated she was the NCACC Deputy Director, and introduced Neil Emory, NCACC Outreach Associate. Ms. Roesler stated there were two (2) questions she would like for each Board member to answer and they are as follows:

1. What led you to decide to run for public office? **and**
2. What are your expectations for today?

Chairman James E. Prevatte: stated the following to the questions.

Question 1 - this is my thirteenth (13th) year as a County Commissioner, and I ran for County Commissioner because I felt I had something to return and add to a county that was not my native county but one I had lived in for a long time.

Question 2 - my expectations for today are to identify some goals, some priorities on what we can set for the next year. We did not have the mid-year check last year like we had planned, but we did touch base on them.

Commissioner Byrd: stated the following to the questions.

Question 1 - this is my thirteenth (13th) year as a County Commissioner, and I ran for County Commissioner because I felt like I could make a difference, and even today, we are facing the same challenges we had back in 1986 - 1990.

Question 2 - I hope we come closer on making some decisions we have been looking at and knowing they were there, and we need to look at them and make some real decisions.

Vice Chairman Amon E. McKenzie: stated the following to the questions.

Question 1 - I was born and raised in Columbus County, and I have been a County Commissioner for nineteen (19) years. I ran for County Commissioner because I felt like I could make a difference, aid and assist to move forward, to help youth, the senior population, bring industry into the County and help give our citizens what they need.

Question 2 - I expect our sites to be set on our goals.

Commissioner Charles T. McDowell: stated the following to the questions.

Question 1 - I am in the middle of my second term as County Commissioner. I ran for County Commissioner because I retired from education and keep up with the statistics from education, and a large percentage of our children never return to Columbus County after college due to lack of good job opportunities.

Question 2 - I expect to scope in two (2) or three (3) objectives that we can not ignore any longer, and zero in on the Historic Courthouse and school construction.

Commissioner Ricky Bullard: stated the following to the questions.

Question 1 - After my 12th year in education, I decided to run for County Commissioner to help Columbus County, push for better schools, push economic development and to help keep our children in Columbus County.

Question 2 - My expectations for today is to continue to put schools on the front burner and the merger of our two (2) school systems.

Commissioner P. Edwin Russ: stated the following to the questions.

Question 1 - This is my 9th year as a County Commissioner, and I decided to run for County Commissioner to help the citizens in Columbus County.

Question 2 - My expectations is to find a workable manner to help our schools in the most beneficial manner.

Commissioner Burroughs: stated the following to the questions.

Question 1 - I ran for County Commissioner to improve my community and make a difference.

Question 2 - I hope we can develop some strategies and goals that will help move us forward today. Schools, economic development and education all go together.

DISCUSSION / COMMENTS:

1. Salaries of the surrounding counties are very close to Columbus County;
2. The surrounding counties do pay for health insurance for their employees;
3. The method used for the salary levels is frustrating to some employees; **and**
4. Developing a method to be used to gain the training expense for an employee who leaves employment soon after the date they are hired.

Agenda Item #3: REVIEW of ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE 2016 RETREAT:

William S. Clark, County Manager, presented the following review of accomplishments since the 2016 retreat.

1. One thing that helped us a lot was infrastructure;
2. We had the gas people in but they did not bring us good news;
3. We finished the Hallsboro Project;
4. We finished the Interconnect Project between water districts, and we no longer buy water from Tabor City;
5. We did a study to see if we could establish a rail between Columbus County and Wilmington and that is a major initiative;
6. We have R.J. Corman Railroad, and they suffered a lot of damage from Hurricane Matthew;
7. We have had a lot of success with economic development;
8. Radix Bay has improved;
9. Project Black - \$1.8 million commitment;
10. Hurricane Matthew was a huge issue and overall, we handled it very well;
11. We got into the State Health Plan and we saved \$1.5 million for the County budget, but the State Health Plan would not take our retirees at the cost of \$680,000;
12. We have completed three (3) phases of the Pay Study, and we have to complete the fourth phase this year;
13. The Home Health Agency and the Solid Waste Contract have been handled;
14. We have had no tax increase in nine (9) years;
15. Southeastern Community College has requested funding;
16. I have supplied you with some marketing issues;
17. We have not had a meeting with our legislators this year;
18. We need to discuss the Board of Elections; **and**
19. We need to decide the direction we are going to go with the Historic Courthouse.

Ms. Roesler stated the importance of meeting with your legislators on a regular basis, and have a face-to-face relationship with them.

Agenda Item #4: COLUMBUS COUNTY'S BUILT and HUMAN CAPITAL: JOBS, SCHOOLS and the ECONOMY:

Lengthy and in-depth discussion was conducted on the following:

1. The great need to execute the plans for the schools in Columbus County;
2. The fact that \$9 million has been designated for the County schools and \$3 million has been designated for the City Schools from the Fund Balance, and to borrow the remainder of \$54 million, plus, for the construction and/or improvements;
3. The request has been sent to the school systems requesting the use of the 40 Sales Tax and 42 Sales Tax to make the payment for this construction and/or improvements;
4. We are waiting on the priority list to be returned from Whiteville City Schools;
5. Face-to-face communications could be useful;
6. Having a financial advisor would be a helpful tool in deciding the most effective way to take on these financial projects;
7. Setting a deadline date would be helpful in getting the information needed for a decision to be made; **and**
8. The manner chosen to proceed with should be the one that will benefit the most children.

RETURN of THANKS and DINNER:

_____ Vice Chairman McKenzie returned thanks and dinner was served.

6:41 P.M. MEETING RESUMED:

Ms. Roseler stated I have brought some data that is on slides that have to do with your employment, your jobs and your school funding, and those kind of things. The question is whether you want to just drop that and focus on this issue of the schools, and the remaining internal operations that you have listed. It appears to me that you are ready to come to some kind of conclusion about what your next steps are with the school facilities plan.

SCHOOLS - DISCUSSION / QUESTIONS / COMMENTS:

- Borrowing \$54 million and using funds from the Fund Balance Account;
- The need for the school systems' commitment to the Sales Tax;
- The needed step to take next to get the results needed;

DISCUSSION / COMMENTS / QUESTIONS:

- A telephone call from Chairman to Chairman is not an unreasonable idea.
- The decision cannot be made until we get the priority list from the schools.
- For something in writing, there is a debt service plan.
- A debt service plan is available.
- Have options in writing for the schools to select from.
- The possibility of sales tax increasing or decreasing, and have a Phase I and Phase II.

Agenda Item #5: INTERNAL OPERATIONS:

Historic Courthouse:

The following options were discussed:

- To be re-bid;
- Will need to be brought up-to-code or may not need to be brought up-to-code;
- Concentrate on maintenance with general repair;
- Move Administration to Historic Courthouse;
- The original plan was to go to the original courthouse;
- Move DA's Office and staff into the Historic Courthouse;
- Make ADA accessible;
- There is a need for Elections and Probation;
- The most prestigious building in Columbus County;
- The need fore one (1) more courtroom has been stated;

- The Historic Courthouse needs to be attractive on the outside; **and**
- Give William S. Clark, County Manager, the authority to give maintenance directions to go to the Historic Courthouse and start what needs to be done on the outside.

Board of Elections:

- The need for a new building;
- Where to locate the Board of Elections and how much money to invest;
- The possibility of using the vacant Home Health area; **and**
- Give the Board of Elections the entire building and move HUD.

Employee Salary and Benefit Needs:

Mr. Clark stated the following:

1. We will do the best we can do with the monetary amount we have to work with;
2. Based on the Pay Study, we will finish Phase IV, and give the best we can;
3. The usage of contracts or agreements to save on the expense of training employees; **and**
4. Increasing staff could prevent increase in the salary of present employees.

Agenda Item #6: DEFINE ACTION ITEMS and NEXT STEPS:

Ms. Roesler stated the following:

1. You got the actions that you agreed to;
2. Mr. Clark will get more information on the retirees;
3. Schedule meetings with your legislators;
4. Seek on your votes on the schools and the Historic Courthouse; **and**
5. The school issue is that we are waiting on some information, the Chairman will contact their Chairman with their priorities with a time limit.

Agenda Item #7: ADJOURNMENT:

At 8:05 P.M., the Chairman stated the meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED:

JUNE B. HALL, Clerk to Board

JAMES E. PREVATTE, Chairman