

**COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
BUDGET WORKSHOP (Second)**

**Tuesday, June 1, 2004  
6:00 P.M.**

The Honorable Columbus County Commissioners met on the above stated date and at the above stated time in the Columbus County Administration Building, Economic Development Conference Room, 111 Washington Street, Whiteville, North Carolina, for the purpose of holding the second Budget Workshop.

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

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

**APPOINTEES PRESENT:**

Billy Joe Farmer, **County Administrator**  
Darren L. Currie, **Assistant County Administrator**  
June B. Hall, **Clerk to Board**  
Gayle B. Godwin, **Finance Officer**

**APPOINTEE ABSENT:**

James E. Hill, Jr., **County Attorney**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:**

At 6:00 P.M., Chairman Memory called the Budget Workshop to order and stated the purpose of this workshop was to discuss matters relative to the Columbus County 2004 - 2005 Operating Budget. The meeting was turned over to Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator.

**ITEMS REMAINING TO BE DISCUSSED:**

Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator, stated there were three (3) items remaining on the Columbus County Capital Needs list, after the May 24, 2004 Budget Workshop, that needed to be discussed, as follows:

1. Water;
2. Staffing request: Sheriff's Department - six (6) positions, Tax Department - two (2) positions; and
3. Basic Policy Matters such as solid waste for the cities on our tax card or ask the cities to start billing.

**ITEM #1: WATER**

Chairman Memory asked Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator, if he had done the calculations on the water figure numbers. Billy Joe Farmer replied stating it was the same figures as I had supplied previously, as listed below:

**Scenario #1:**

Water District II:  $656,000 \div 2,200 = 298$   
 $298 \div 90\% = \$331.00$

Water District III:  $539,000 \div 1,500 = 359$   
 $359 \div 90\% = \$398.00$

**Scenario #2: (No water bill assumed)**

Water District II:  
 $656,000$   
 $2200 \times 240 \times .92 = \underline{485,760}$   
 $170,240$

**\$240.00 for 1<sup>st</sup> 2,000 gallons, \$7.00/1,000 gallons thereafter**

**\*Will need \$7.00 each month from each customer**

Water District III:

	539,000
1500 x 240 x .92	<u>331,200</u>
	207,800

**\$240 for 1<sup>st</sup> 1,000 gallons, \$7.00/1,000 gallons thereafter**

**\*Will need \$12.55 each month from each customer**

Basically, you have two (2) options as follows:

1. Pay for itself; **and**
2. Do it through a composite of property tax listing, plus so much for the sale of water and that would boil down to the policy the Board chooses.

Commissioner McKenzie presented the following proposal for perusal and consideration by the Board.

**WATER PROPOSAL by**  
**COMMISSIONER AMON E. MCKENZIE**

1. Mandatory Water Hookup Suspended.
2. Ask citizens to use the water - Remind them that we do have an obligation to pay for these two (2) water systems.
3. Allow the proper procedure a chance to work before we take crucial steps in another direction.
4. Look for ways to cut the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) costs.
5. Pass a Resolution to obtain a County-wide water system. This will allow better control, and if we need to raise taxes, we can utilize the entire County. NOTE: each person will then pay less.
6. Water meters are presently \$400.00, as promised. Early hookups were \$100.00, unless area is new (where new lines are installed). Poll the citizens and ask if they will sign up before the lines are installed at the promotional early signup fee of \$100.00, informing them clearly that after the lines are installed, the cost will be \$400.00.
7. Our main goal should be to extend to the citizens the option of using the water which will be a positive action, and not a negative one.

Commissioner McKenzie stated that Water Districts II and III had not been in operation long enough to see if this would work. I have been polling the citizens in the area and have discovered that this is what they prefer.

Lengthy and in-depth discussion was conducted by the Board members relative to the feasibility of this proposal versus the feasibility of the proposal previously submitted by Commissioner Godwin.

Commissioner Wilson suggested to Leroy Sellers, Water Office Supervisor, to look closely at the Operations and Maintenance costs. Information was presented for the Bladen County Water Department in comparison to the Columbus County Water Department.

Additional lengthy discussion was conducted by the Board members relative to the proposal submitted by Commissioner Godwin at the May 19, 2004 Water Workshop. After everyone in attendance had an opportunity to voice their suggestions, it was the general consensus of the Board to use the proposal submitted by Commissioner Godwin with the following revisions:

**SHORT TERM SOLUTION**

- #3 Change the three thousand (3,000) gallons to two thousand (2,000) gallons

**LONG TERM SOLUTION**

- #1 Delete completely, and this issue may be revisited in the future.

In order to derive at some direction for staff to follow in the preparation of the budgetary matters, a straw poll was taken with the following results:

**AYES: Commissioner Godwin**

**AYES (with the stipulation that the gallons for Districts II and III would remain the same and the fee charged would be equal:**

**Commissioners Wilson,  
Chairman Memory, Vice  
Chairman Dutton, Norris,  
Jacobs**

**NAYS: Commissioner McKenzie**

**ITEM #2: STAFF**

Chairman Memory stated the second item to be discussed was the requests we have received for additional staff. He requested Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator, to explain. Mr. Farmer replied stating he had received requests for eight (8) additional staff (six -6- for the Sheriff's Department and two -2- for the Tax Department) which would cost three hundred fifty thousand and 00/100 (\$350,000.00) dollars and this amount is inclusive of all costs. This would be approximately one and one-half (1 ½) cents property tax increase or Fund Balance appropriated. Staff needs direction on how to handle this amount.

Sheriff Batten supplied the following information on the six (6) positions he was requesting:

1. Four (4) positions for Detention which would provide a minimum of four (4) per shift;
2. Two (2) for transporting purposes; and
3. Seventh employee to serve papers.

These figures are based entirely on what the results are from the mandates the State has placed on Columbus County and what Donnie Byrd allows us to do with whatever the cap will be that is placed on the jail.

Vice Chairman Dutton asked Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator, about the pay increases for the County employees as to whether this amount was included in the budget. Mr. Farmer replied stating he had included the across-the-board five (5%) percent increase but had received some information from Chris May, but this information is based on mid-range in lieu of a five (5%) percent increase across the Board. I will need to look at this information and see if we have allotted enough money to accommodate this move, and I will have this information ready for you by Monday night.

Commissioner Godwin asked Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator, what tax collection rate was used to calculate the upcoming budget on. Mr. Farmer replied stating he had used a ninety-five percent (95%) percent tax collection rate to calculate the budget.

Vice Chairman Dutton asked if the sale of certain County property had been included in the calculation of the budget. Mr. Farmer replied stating no it had not been included, but could be.

Chairman Memory stated the pay increase would have to be handled at a later date.

Chairman Memory asked if any money had been allotted in the Budget for the housing of the jail inmates if the cap of sixty-seven (67) had to be enforced.

After lengthy discussion was conducted regarding various ways to generate the necessary revenue to meet these staffing requests as submitted by the Sheriff's Department and the Tax Department, a straw poll was taken with the following results:

**AYES: Chairman Memory and Commissioner Godwin**

**AYES (with the stipulation the funds for these additional positions would not be taken from Fund Balance): Commissioner Wilson**

**AYES: (with the stipulation there would be no tax increase): Commissioners Norris, Jacobs and McKenzie**

**NO VOTE:** Vice Chairman Dutton

A lengthy discussion was conducted regarding the need for additional staffing that had been added in the last year without any discussion with the Board, relative to the elimination of these positions to provide the necessary funds for the additional staff being requested, to avoid having a tax increase.

**ITEM #3: SOLID WASTE USER FEES**

Chairman Memory stated there was a need to discuss trash collection and solid waste user fees.

Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator, stated he had worked this out and what he needed now was a policy decision relative to the solid waste fees for the towns and cities.

A lengthy discussion was conducted regarding the reason for doing this and the advantages, if any. A straw poll was taken to leave the billing the same, with the following results:

**AYES:** Chairman Memory, Vice Chairman Dutton, Commissioners Godwin, Wilson, Norris, Jacobs and McKenzie  
**NAYS:** None

**Commercial Haulers:**

Commissioner Godwin stated he and Commissioner Dutton had received multiple telephone calls from private citizens regarding the unfairness of them being charged the annual fee for a brown trash can, and having to pay for a commercial hauler which costs from five hundred to six hundred and 00/100 (\$500.00 to \$600.00) dollars per year.

Discussion was conducted by the Board members relative to this matter. Billy Joe Farmer, County Administrator, stated the existing contract we now have states we must have a minimum of seventeen thousand (17,000) pickups and an average of seventeen thousand eight hundred (17,800) minimum tonnage.

Commissioner Godwin stated there should be a stipulation in the existing Ordinance stating the farmers and business owners who would qualify for this, that the business would be attached to their primary residences, or within so many feet.

Discussion ensued relative to the portions of the annual bill that were for collection and disposal, operation of the convenience centers and operating of the Solid Waste Department.

After additional lengthy discussion was conducted, it was the general consensus of the Board to have staff check into this matter and bring the results back to the Board, and the eighty-seven and 00/100 (\$87.00) dollars would remain on the tax bill.

**Comments from Board Members:**

Chairman Memory stated he would go around the table and ask all the County Commissioners if they had any comments they would like to make. The comments were as follows:

1. **Commissioner Godwin:** This is dealing with the Special Appropriations we make every year, on Page 75, of the information you have distributed to the Board. On the non-profits, did all of these listed go through the process we established earlier. Darren Currie, Assistant County Administrator, replied stating yes they did, and he had met with the Finance Committee to determine who would be eligible and who would not be. Mr. Currie stated he had received two (2) applications late, one (1) from the Arts Council and one (1) from the Carousel Center, Incorporated. One (1) application was received from the Columbus County Youth and Families but did not state an amount requested. I need direction from the Board as to what they would like to do regarding these three (3) applications.

Commissioner Godwin stated he would like for each County Commissioner to be allotted an equal amount of discretionary funds to utilize as they see fit to tax-exempt and non-profit organizations.

Mr. Currie stated Ms. Janet Gray, school nurse for Whiteville City Schools, was present, and she would like to introduce Ms. D. Diana Woolley from The Carousel Center, Incorporated, who would like to present some information regarding The Carousel Center. Ms. Woolley stated the following:

- A. This organization was established to treat sexually abused children which none of us like to think about.
- B. We opened in January, 2000.
- C. We have seen five hundred eighty-nine (589) children so far and one hundred fourteen (114) have been from Columbus County which is the second highest number in the counties we presently serve.
- D. Previously, these children were taken to the Emergency Room at the hospital for examination and then to Chapel Hill for further testing which we feel adds to the drama they have already experienced.
- E. We provide forensic medical examinations and a one (1) stop shop which is child friendly.
- F. The costs for the full array of services we offer, for each child, is one thousand five hundred and 00/100 (\$1,500.00) dollars.
- G. We are reimbursed by Medicaid only three hundred twenty-five and 00/100 (\$325.00) dollars and the balance comes from private insurance, if any, and donations.
- H. We are requesting a donation of ten thousand and 00/100 (\$10,000.00) dollars to help defray the costs of treating these children.

Sheriff Batten stated he and sheriffs from the other counties that were served by this organization had been invited for a tour of this facility. He stated what he observed was a fine establishment that was professionally operated by a fine staff and he would like permission from the Board to donate two thousand five hundred and 00/100 (\$2,500.00) dollars from the Drug Fund, as Sheriff Causey had done. Chairman Memory stated this would be handled at the June 7, 2004 Board Meeting.

2 **Commissioner Wilson:** No Comments.

3 **Chairman Memory:** I would like to see the budgetary appropriations given to fire and rescue departments equalized. As it is now, it appears the stand-alone fire and rescue departments are receiving more monetary amounts than the combination fire and rescue departments.

Lengthy discussion was conducted regarding this matter with no resolve.

4 **Vice Chairman Dutton:** No Comments.

5 **Commissioner Norris:** No Comments.

6 **Commissioner Jacobs:** Did you get a letter from Town Hall regarding doing some work on Rescue about more space when they move into their new building? If you did not get a letter, you will be receiving one.

7 **Commissioner McKenzie:** I would like to give my time to Mr. Ernie Gaskins. Mr. Gaskins stated the following:

- A. I was reared in a family where a lot of emphasis was placed on creating a safe and constructive environment for children.
- B. I moved back to Whiteville ten (10) years ago and discovered there were many children who did not have this.
- C. I started an establishment called the Library which is a center designed to provide a safe and controlled environment for teenagers of Columbus County.
- D. This establishment is costing me one thousand and 00/100 (\$1,000.00) dollars for rent per month.
- E. I have been paying four to five hundred (\$400 to \$500) dollars per month for insurance.
- F. This establishment is an inter-racial one which provides a melting pot for our community.
- G. We have been in operation for approximately one and one-half (1 ½) years.
- H. The bottom line is that I simply cannot continue to finance this expense.

- I. What has happened is that a report was submitted that some of our kids had rocked a police car, but the car had no physical damage, and this information eventually reached the Columbus County Youth and Families.
- J. I am simply asking the Board of Commissioners to pay the one thousand and 00/100 (\$1,000.00) dollars rent per month and I will give my time freely on Friday and Saturday nights.
- K. This was a vision of mine and I hate to see it end for the sake of our kids.
- L. The contract ends in October, 2004 and I will see this through until then, but if I cannot get enough donations before then, I will have to let it close.
- M. Any help that can be given will be greatly appreciated.

Discussion was conducted by the Board members regarding the fact of the great benefit this establishment was providing for the area youth, the dedication and genuine efforts of Mr. Gaskins, the requirements for an establishment to follow when requesting donations that had previously been established and the possibility of whether the funds could be located to do this with.

Chairman Memory asked if there were any more items that needed to be addressed at this Budget Workshop. There were no further comments.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

At 8:51 P.M., Chairman Memory stated this Budget Workshop was adjourned.

**APPROVED:**

  
JUNE B. HALL, Clerk to Board

  
BILL MEMORY, Chairman