

COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**Monday, February 21, 2005****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 third Monday.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Sammie Jacobs, **Chairman**
 Kipling Godwin, **Vice Chairman**
 Amon E. McKenzie
 James E. Prevatte
 Bill Memory
 Lynwood Norris
 David L. Dutton, Jr.

APPOINTEES PRESENT:

Billy Joe Farmer, **County Manager**
 James E. Hill, Jr., **County Attorney**
 Darren L. Currie, **Assistant County Manager**
 June B. Hall, **Clerk to Board**
 Roxanne Coleman, **Finance Officer**

Agenda Items #1 and #2: MEETING CALLED TO ORDER and INVOCATION:

At 7:30 P.M., Chairman Jacobs called the meeting to order. The invocation was delivered by Commissioner Memory. With Boy Scott Trop #513 from Whiteville United Methodist Church leading, everyone in attendance stood and pledged Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Agenda Item #3: BOARD MINUTES APPROVAL:

Vice Chairman Godwin made a motion to approve the January 31, 2005 Workshop Minutes, seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

Commissioner Prevatte made a motion to approve the February 08, 2005 Regular Session Minutes with a correction on Item #6, and that correction being the addition of a motion, a second to the motion, and a vote on the board action. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

Agenda Item #4: CDBG GRANT #04-R-1281 UPDATE:

Beverlee Nance, Southeastern Community College, introduced Jeanne Tongson as the facilitator that was retained for the CDBG Grant #04-R-1281, Microenterprise Entrepreneurial Assistance. Ms. Tongson delivered the following update:

1. I have been retained as the facilitator for this grant;
2. I have met with thirty-five (35) people who may be interested in pursuing this grant;
3. I have received a commitment from twenty (20) people for the training necessary for this grant;
4. The information and details of this grant have been brought from Raleigh to Columbus County;
5. This is a thirteen (13) week completion program; and
6. We have come up with the most well thought-out plan possible.

Agenda Item #4: PROCLAMATION - PROCLAMATION of AMERICAN RED CROSS MONTH:**Tabled****Agenda Item #6: TIMEWARNER CABLE - SYSTEM UPDATE:**

Pat Smith, General Manager of the Elizabethtown/Whiteville System presented the following update to the Board.

1. I hand delivered a check in the amount of twenty-eight thousand two hundred ninety-six and 67/100 (\$28,296.67) dollars for the franchise tax due Columbus County, which reflects an increase from last year of approximately one thousand five hundred and 00/100 (\$1,500.00) dollars;

2. We now have a new logo which is located on the front of our Customer Information Kit. The new logo reads: Cable, High-Speed Online - Digital Phone;
3. In the Customer Information Kit, you will find pamphlets on the left hand side entitled the following: 1) High Speed Online; 2) Digital Cable; and 3) General Information;
4. In the middle of the Customer Information Kit, there are pamphlets entitled the following: 1) Rates and Packages; 2) Quick Reference Guide; 3) Digital Phone; and 4) Channel Line Up;
5. On the right hand side of the Customer Information Kit, there are pamphlets entitled the following: 1) Payments; 2) Privacy Note; 3) High Definition, Television, Digital Video, Recorder; and 4) Operations & Services;
6. This Customer Information Kit is given to all of our new customers;
7. We now have a community channel, Channel 6, which gives access to community events;
8. We are now part of a call center in Whiteville; **and**
9. A service call is at no charge.

Commissioner Memory asked Ms. Smith why local radar was unavailable most of the time. Ms. Smith replied stating they had experienced some problems but it should up and running now and she would check into this matter.

Commissioner McKenzie asked Ms. Smith if the basic charge had gone up. Ms. Smith replied stating the rate charge goes up every year.

Commissioner McKenzie asked Ms. Smith at what percentage did the rate charge go up. Ms. Smith replied stating the rate charge went up at whatever the SCC allows and I will find out and call you with this information.

Commissioner Memory asked Ms. Smith if you have to have digital cable to have digital phone. Ms. Smith replied stating that they do encourage this.

Vice Chairman Godwin stated the Board really appreciates the check you delivered and I would like to know if your company provides complimentary cable to non-profit organizations such as the senior centers. Ms. Smith replied stating yes we do as long as it does not involve extensive work to deliver this service, and all we need for this to happen is for Billy Joe Farmer, County Manager, to request this service.

Agenda Item #7: EMERGENCY SERVICES - RESOLUTION in OPPOSITION to FY2005 HOMELAND SECURITY GRANT FUND DISTRIBUTION METHODS:

Ronnie Hayes, Emergency Services Director, requested Board approval and adoption of the following Resolution.

RESOLUTION IN OPPOSITION TO FY2005 HOMELAND SECURITY GRANT FUNDING DISTRIBUTION METHODS

WHEREAS, the various Counties of this State, each having its own distinction, have unique safety and security requirements and obligations, and each County must fully and immediately respond to whatever emergency or disaster occurrence may happen upon that county; **and**

WHEREAS, the State of North Carolina has chosen to restrict the whole of FY2005 Homeland Security Grant funding to those projects that are regionally based and VIPER compliant; **and**

WHEREAS, emergencies and disaster occurrences require an immediate response from within the county, as well as a response from other agencies in the region; **and**

WHEREAS, Columbus County has already chosen an interoperable communications system that is cost-efficient, is not restricted to a sole vendor, and is thereby not VIPER compliant; **and**

WHEREAS, based on the selection methods specified by the North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, the aforementioned grant award process does not offer the citizens of Columbus County the same level of preparedness afforded other counties in the State, and therefore does not meet the intentions of the local government to offer its citizens the maximum level of preparedness available.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the Columbus County Board of Commissioners is opposed to the FY2005 Homeland Security Grant Award funding process until such process is modified to give both fair and equitable consideration to all counties in the State of North Carolina.

ADOPTED this the 21st day of February, 2005.

COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
/s/ **SAMMIE JACOBS, Chairman**

ATTESTED BY:
/s/ **JUNE B. HALL, Clerk to Board**

Ronnie Hayes stated a large number of the medium to small-sized counties was very upset about this funding and were submitting resolutions in an attempt to get this changed. We have a meeting in early March to discuss this matter further.

Commissioner Memory made a motion to approve the Resolution in Opposition to FY2005 Homeland Security Grant Fund Distribution Methods, seconded by Commissioner Prevatte. The motion so carried.

Agenda Item #8: SOIL and WATER CONSERVATION - COLUMBUS COUNTY AIRPORT BEAVER PROBLEM/DRAINAGE:

Donna G. Register, District Conservationist, requested Board approval to assist Columbus County Airport with beaver/drainage problems by the usage of drainage monies in the amount of one thousand and 00/100 (\$1,000.00) dollars which will be taken from Columbus SWCD Drainage Line Item that has been approved for Fiscal Year 2004-2005.

Commissioner Norris made a motion to approve the usage of drainage monies in the amount of one thousand and 00/100 (\$1,000.00) dollars which will be taken from Columbus SWCD Drainage Line Item that has been approved for Fiscal Year 2004-2005 for the purpose of assisting Columbus County Airport with beaver/drainage problems, seconded by Commissioner Memory. The motion so carried.

Agenda Item #9: LIBRARY - DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE:

Morris Pridgen, Jr., Library Director, presented the following Departmental Update to the Board.

1. The past fiscal year was very successful;
2. The East Columbus Library is doing very well in its new location;
3. We are getting more information out to the general public;
4. We offer services to the general public in-house and mobile;
5. Our circulation for last year was approximately 238,970;
6. We provide outreach services and homebound services;
7. Our bookmobile stays very busy;
8. We now have a Wellcare Network which is by Trillion;
9. We are checking into and applying for all grants that are available to us; **and**
10. I would like to thank my staff for all their good work, the Board of County Commissioners for their support, and all the patrons that support us.

Commissioner McKenzie asked Mr. Pridgen how he maintained the statistics on the patrons visiting the library. Mr. Pridgen replied stating the Polaris System supplied this information for him.

Commissioner Memory asked Mr. Pridgen if a thank you letter had been sent to the patron that made the sizable donation to the library to enable East Columbus Library to move to its new location. Mr. Pridgen replied stating he did not think one had been sent.

MOTION:

Commissioner Memory made a motion for the Columbus County Library Director and the Clerk to the Board to prepare a nice Proclamation of Thanks, to be framed, for the patron who had made the sizable donation to Columbus County for the expenses incurred to relocate the East

Columbus Library, seconded by Commissioner Norris. The motion so carried.

AGENDA ADD-ON:

LIBRARY - EZ BASIC EQUIPMENT GRANT:

Morris Pridgen, Library Director, requested Board approval to apply for the EZ Basic Equipment Grant as follows.

**State Library of North Carolina - Library Services and Technology Act
EZ BASIC EQUIPMENT GRANT
2005-2006
Application**

DUE DATE: Original and required copies must be received by 5:00 P.M. February 22, 2005 in the Library Development Section Office, Room 210.

INSTITUTION/LIBRARY: Columbus County Public Library System

MAILING ADDRESS: 407 N. Powell Boulevard, Whiteville, North Carolina 28472

U.S. CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT (in which institution is located): 7th District

PROJECT MANAGER, NAME/TITLE: Morris Pridgen, Jr., Library Director

PHONE: (910) 642-3116 FAX: (910) 642-3839 EMAIL: mpridgen@columbusco.org

FUNDS (whole dollars only):	Grant Amount Requested:	\$18,516
	(Grant request maximum \$25,000; minimum \$2,500)	+
	Matching Funds	\$ 3,268
(Match must equal at least 15% of grant amount requested)	Total Project Funds =	\$21,784

ABSTRACT: Provide a brief abstract of your project. Do not exceed the space below.

CERTIFICATION AND SIGNATURES:

We are aware of, and agree to comply with, all state and federal provisions and assurances required under this grant program. If awarded grant funds, we assure that we will carry out the grant project according to the approved grant proposal. This application has been authorized by the appropriate authorities of the applying institution/library.

Morris Pridgen, Jr.
Printed name of Library Director

Sammie Jacobs, Chairman, Columbus County
Printed name & title of local government or institutional authorizing official

/s/ Morris Pridgen, Library Director

/s/ Sammie Jacobs

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Mr. Pridgen stated this grant would replace twenty-eight (28) computers and required a fifteen (15%) percent county match which they would have in their next fiscal year budget.

Commissioner Memory made a motion to approve the EZ Basic Equipment Grant in the amount of eighteen thousand five hundred sixteen and 00/100 (\$18,516.00) dollars, with a fifteen (15%) percent county match of three thousand two hundred sixty-eight and 00/100 (\$3,268.00) dollars, which will come from the Library's budget, seconded by Commissioner Prevatte. The motion so carried.

Agenda Item #10: INSPECTIONS - DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE:

Kenny Davis, Building Inspections Director, delivered the following Departmental Update to the Board.

1. Number of permits issued increased by 37%;
2. Currently performing 8-10 inspections per day, per inspector
3. Now conducting permitting and inspections for the Town of Chadbourn and Lake Waccamaw;
4. Upcoming large-scale project to be permitted:
 - A. Porter Swamp Baptist Church Fellowship Hall/multi purpose building;
 - B. NC State Prison;
 - C. Wastewater Treatment Plant; and
 - D. Williams Township School (plans to be delivered this week Fedex);
5. Current large-scale projects under construction:
 - A. Chadbourn Town Hall;
 - B. Beaverdam Baptist Church additions;
 - C. International Paper Sawmill Modernization Project; and
 - D. Columbus County Farm Bureau (Chadbourn Branch);
6. February 17, 2005 - contacted by programmer at ILS - Permitting/Inspections Program implementation currently on schedule (would like to thank the Commissioners for the approval of this software);
7. Current earnings for the fiscal year are as projected;
8. 2004 Year-end figures are as follows:

Permits Issued:

Single Family Dwellings	49
Manufactured/Modular	305
Electrical/HVAC	324
Remodel/Additions	145
Commercial	<u>32</u>

Total # of permits issued: 855

Total 2004 Earnings: \$165,632.00

9. 2004-2005 Fiscal Year-End Figures as of January, 2005:

Single Family Dwellings	33
Manufactured/Modular	176
Electrical/HVAC	193
Remodel/Additions	60
Commercial	<u>25</u>

Total # of permits issued: 487

Total Fiscal Year Earning
As of January 2005: \$91,518.00

Commissioner Memory asked Mr. Davis why the decrease in the manufactured/modular house number. Mr. Davis replied stating it was due to the damage from the hurricanes that had occurred and the largest percentage of the houses damaged were replaced with manufactured or modular houses.

Commissioner McKenzie asked Mr. Davis if he had the adequate help he needed for the increase in the workload. Mr. Davis replied stating if the Level III position was approved, that would supply the help he needed.

Vice Chairman Godwin noted that the number of permits issued between the two (2) years was a decrease instead of an increase.

Agenda Item #11: TAX DEPARTMENT - TAX COLLECTION REPORT:

Richard Gore, Columbus County Tax Administrator, presented the following Tax Collection Report.

A. Report of the tax amount collected:

Report for Period Beginning July 1, 2003 and Ending January 31, 2004: \$1,602,670
82.66%

Report for Period Beginning July 1, 2004 and Ending January 31, 2005:	\$1,920,093
(Includes all fees)	83.48%
Outstanding Taxes for Last Nine (9) Years Collected:	98.36%
(Real and Personal)	
Outstanding Tax Report - 1993-2004	61%
(Vehicles)	

B. Report of the tax amount remaining uncollected:

Outstanding Tax Report (Real and Personal) 1995-2004:	\$2,550,498.41
Outstanding Tax Report (Vehicles) 1993-2004:	\$ 920,863.54

C. Steps being taken to encourage or enforce payment of uncollected taxes:

1. Doug Ward is on staff now and is working into a Deputy Collector position. He has been very effective and the collection rate is on the upward trend;
2. The Deputy Tax Collector has experienced multiple health problems leading to a lot of absence from work which resulted in a hindrance to the collection process;
3. I firmly believe one (1) more aggressive and effective Deputy Collector on staff would greatly aid the collection rate; **and**
4. Since the revaluation is almost completed, the Tax Office will be able to concentrate more heavily on the collection process.

Commissioner Godwin asked Mr. Gore what the status was of the Debt Setoff Program that the Board had voted to put into effect. Mr. Gore replied stating the Debt Setoff Program was a very time consuming process and the Tax Office had been very busy with the revaluation which was done in-house, thus saving Columbus County a large amount of money.

Commissioner Godwin stated he would like for Mr. Gore to talk to other counties that are implementing the Debt Setoff Program to obtain inside knowledge of the overall operations of how this program works, from beginning to end. Commissioner Godwin asked Mr. Gore where the Tax Office was at on the second notices for property taxes. Mr. Gore replied stating the second notices would be mailed out March 1, 2005. We then have to wait thirty (30) days before any other action can take place which would be April 1, 2005.

Commissioner Godwin asked Mr. Gore what the next step would be after the advertisement had taken place. Shirley Settlemyre, Deputy Tax Collector, replied stating after the advertisement had taken place, the Tax Office would start the collection process which can be quite lengthy.

Commissioner Memory asked Mr. Gore if the tax collection rate would be at ninety-five (95%) percent by June 30, 2005 and if the Tax Office had sent out foreclosure notices for the 2003 taxes. Mr. Gore replied stating with some staff re-alignment and one (1) more aggressive Deputy Tax Collector on staff, he felt comfortable in stating we would be at ninety-five (95%) percent by June 30, 2005, excluding vehicles. In reference to the uncollected Year 2003 Property Taxes, Mr. Gore replied stating the foreclosure process is quite a lengthy process and it has been started, but in several cases involving mobile and manufactured housing, the property needs to be looked out to determine if the value of the property will be more than the cost of the process or less.

Vice Chairman Godwin asked Mr. Gore how many garnishments had been put into place. Ms. Settlemyre replied stating she did not know but Ann Lanier had the number and she would find this number out and call with this information.

Vice Chairman Godwin stated the Board needed more detailed information regarding the Debt Setoff Program and when Mr. Gore was going to put this program into place.

MOTION:

Commissioner Prevatte made a motion put the Debt Setoff Program into action by the next fiscal year, seconded by Vice Chairman Godwin.

After additional discussion was conducted regarding the details of the Debt Setoff Program, a poll vote was taken with the following results:

AYES: Chairman Jacobs, Vice Chairman Godwin, Commissioners Memory, Norris,

Prevatte and Dutton
NAYS: Commissioner McKenzie.

The motion passed on a six (6) to one (1) vote.

Agenda Item #12: APPOINTMENT - NURSING/ADULT CARE HOME JOINT COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Vice Chairman Godwin made a motion to reappoint Herb Harp to the Nursing/Adult Care Home Joint Community Advisory Committee for a one (1) year term, with term expiring January 20, 2006, seconded by Commissioner Dutton. The motion so carried.

Agenda Item #13: COMMENTS:

Chairman Jacobs opened the floor for any comments that anyone would like to make. The following people.

A. Public:

Noah David Long: stated the following:

1. As a result of some events that have occurred in my life lately, I have adopted a different view on life;
2. I have reached a decision to try to approach matters that concern me in a different manner;
3. I now realize that the approach I used previously when speaking to the Board on various matters may not have been the correct one;
4. I would like to extend an apology if I offended anyone because that was certainly not my intent to do so;
5. I am still interested in the matters I have spoken to you about, on previous occasions, and will continue to pursue them, but in a much more rational manner;
6. I am very interested in working with the Board of County Commissioners and the private citizens of Columbus County in accomplishing the greater good for all concerned;
7. I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to you tonight; **and**
8. I would like to tell you about two (2) new businesses in Columbus County, L & L Motorcycles and Resources Unlimited, that I am involved in and would like for you to visit.

RECOGNITION of DEPARTMENT HEADS:

Chairman Jacobs recognized the department heads that were in attendance and asked if any of them wanted to make any comments. The following department head spoke.

Sheriff Batten: I would like to thank the Board of County Commissioners for allowing the Boy Scouts Troop 513, from Whiteville United Methodist Church, to participate in the meeting tonight. This is very helpful in their journey to be better boy scouts.

B Board of Commissioners:

1. **Commissioner Memory:** stated the following:
 - A. I have compiled a report relative to retail sales for Whiteville and Columbus County for the period of time from 1996 to 2004 of which I will supply a copy to the Clerk to the Board for anyone's reference;
 - B. Based on the statistical data I have compiled, the retail sales have increased slightly, and Columbus County and Whiteville are very much in line with other counties and cities of comparable size and slightly larger; **and**
 - C. This information lets me know Columbus County is not in that bad of a shape when retail sales increase.
2. **Commissioner McKenzie:** It would be very helpful if the press would print in the articles they write regarding water district extensions, the essential date for the water accessibility in lieu of leading the citizens to believe they will have water right away. This would eliminate many questions that are being asked and many telephone calls to the County Commissioners.
3. **Vice Chairman Godwin:** I believe the promotion the Chamber of Commerce has sponsored

for the past few years, "Spend March in Columbus County", has boosted our retail sales.

C Manager:

Billy Joe Farmer stated the following:

1. I have received confirmation, by telephone, from Julie Haigler, North Carolina Rural Center, that Columbus County has been awarded the amount of three hundred eighty-five thousand two hundred fourteen and 00/100 (\$385,214.00) dollars for the Water District V, Guideway Elementary School Project, as their portion of the Clean Water Bond Fund; and
2. I would like to get a Budget Amendment approved by the Board so we can proceed in completing all the documents necessary for this project (**budget amendment was not available for review**).

MOTION:

Commissioner Norris made a motion to approve a budget amendment for the Water District V, Guideway Elementary School Project, to allow Billy Joe Farmer, County Manager, to complete all the documents necessary for this project, seconded by Commissioner McKenzie. The motion so carried. (**Budget amendment was not available for review and has not been made available for recordation in the Board Minutes.**)

RECESS REGULAR SESSION and enter into CLOSED SESSION in ACCORDANCE WITH N.C.G.S. §143-318.11 (5) and (6):

Agenda Item #14: CLOSED SESSION in ACCORDANCE WITH N.C.G.S. §143-318.11 (5) and (6):

At 8:41 P.M., Commissioner Dutton made a motion to recess Regular Session and enter into Closed Session in accordance with N.C.G.S. §143.318.11 (5) and (6), seconded by Vice Chairman Godwin. The motion so carried.

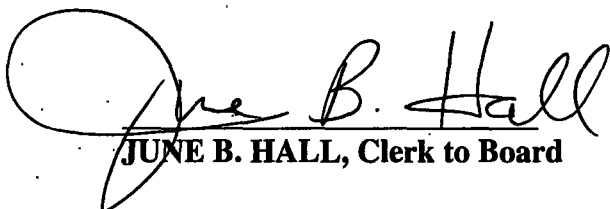
No official action was taken.

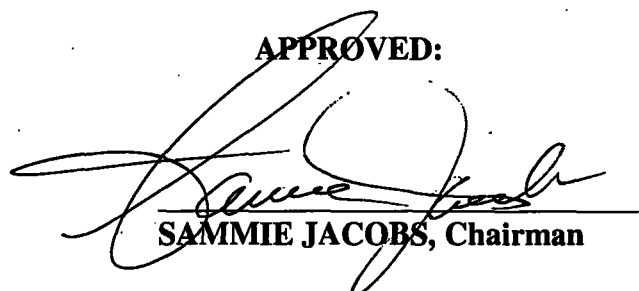
At 10:17 P.M., Commissioner Norris made a motion to adjourn Closed Session and resume Regular Session, seconded by Commissioner Prevatte. The motion so carried.

Agenda Item #15: ADJOURNMENT:

At 10:19 P.M., Commissioner McKenzie made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Vice Chairman Godwin. The motion so carried.

APPROVED:


JUNE B. HALL, Clerk to Board


SAMMIE JACOBS, Chairman