

**COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET WORKSHOP**

Thursday, June 23, 2005

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 conducting a Budget Workshop.

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**
Darren L. Currie, **Assistant County Manager**
June B. Hall, **Clerk to Board**
Roxanne Coleman, **Finance Officer**

BUDGET WORKSHOP CALLED to ORDER:

At 6:00 P.M., Chairman Jacobs called the Budget Workshop to order and stated this was an informal meeting to discuss budgetary matters.

The following budgetary items were discussed:

Travel Expenses Over Budget:

Commissioner Memory stated he received a telephone call today regarding the travel expenses being over budget for the Governing Body and the Administration Departments, and requested Billy Joe Farmer, County Manager, to check into this matter. Mr. Farmer distributed a printout of the listed travel expenses for these two (2) departments.

Discussion was conducted and a determination was reached the printed figures were misleading and several of the expenses listed were to be reimbursed.

Removal of 12 Positions from Sheriff's Budget:

Sheriff Christopher Batten distributed a letter to the Board of Commissioners reflecting he had removed the twelve (12) new positions requested for detention officers for the new jail, from his budget, which would be a total savings of \$325,866. Sheriff Batten emphasized to the Board of Commissioners this amount would have to be included in the 2006 - 2007 Budget.

(On Record) Commissioner Prevatte requested that it go on record the twelve (12) new positions that Sheriff Batten had removed from his budget for a total savings of \$325,866, would have to be included in the 2006-2007 Budget.

Five (5%) Percent Salary Increase for Employees:

Chairman Jacobs stated it had been suggested by several private citizens the County Commissioners should not receive the five (5%) percent salary increase. This is optional and the Board members can decide to take or not to take it.

Commissioner Prevatte stated it was his understanding the five (5%) percent increase was a starting point to get our employees to a regional average salary level with the new Pay Plan. It needs to be determined by Administration staff if the County employees have already been given a five (5%) percent salary increase. It is my suggestion that if the County employees have already received a five (5%) percent salary increase with the new Pay Plan, then they should receive a two and one-half (2 ½%) percent salary increase, in lieu of a five (5%) percent salary increase, and stay in line with the State.

Commissioner McKenzie stated Columbus County was the lowest paying county in the region and

we were only a training ground for employees when they located higher paying jobs in other counties. I favor the five (5%) percent increase.

(Go on Record): Commissioners Prevatte and Dutton, simultaneously, stated they would like for it to go on record that they do not favor a five (5%) percent salary increase for themselves.

After discussion was conducted among the Board members, relative to the question as to whether the new Pay Plan had been fully implemented or only partially implemented, Vice Chairman Godwin stated that was a good question for Billy Joe Farmer, County Manager, to check into what the recorded actions of the Board were, and what exactly had been done with the new Pay Plan, and bring this information back to the Board at the next Budget Workshop.

Revenue (Spin Off Register of Deeds Building):

Commissioner Memory stated the Board was considering spinning off the old Register of Deeds Building as a source of revenue, and that two hundred thousand, plus, (\$200,000+) dollars had been paid for the building.

Additional Discussion on Salary Increases:

Commissioner Memory stated it was his understanding the five (5%) percent salary increase, with the new Pay Plan, would bring County employees one-half (½) way to their mid point. Chris May released an e-mail stating the new Pay Plan had been fully implemented in November, 2004 and the County employees were to receive their retroactive pay for the previous three (3) months in their November paychecks. I was under the impression the new Pay Plan would require a two (2) year implementation.

Lengthy discussion was conducted among the Board members relative to what indeed had been done, and what indeed was suppose to have been done with the new Pay Plan. The question arose relative to a five (5%) percent salary increase for County employees or a two and one-half (2 ½%) percent salary increase. A poll vote was taken for a general consensus of the Board if the County employees salary increase would be five (5%) percent or two and one-half (2 ½%) percent, with the following results:

AYES: Chairman Jacobs, Vice Chairman Godwin, Commissioners McKenzie, Memory, Norris and Dutton
NAYS: Commissioner Prevatte.

Frank (did not state last name),-private citizen, stated he did not think the County Commissioners should get any salary raise.

Commissioner Prevatte stated the following:

1. If we have done what we promised we would do with the new Pay Plan, then we need to stay in line with the State on the salary increases;
2. We need to make sure we have done what we said we would do, then, if discovery is made that we have not, then we need to execute on what we said we would do; **and**
3. No one seems to know if this action has taken place or not, and we need to know if this has been done or not, before we can make a good decision on what to do.

Suggested Areas in Budget to Eliminate:

1. Vice Chairman Godwin made a recommendation that all new vehicles be removed from the budget, and then handle this on a case-by-case basis, as needed.
2. Emergency Services (equipment): replace \$18,000 with \$9,300 for a decontamination trailer.
3. Discussion was conducted on the large increase in travel for several departments.

Actions to be Taken to Reduce Budget:

After lengthy discussion was conducted relative to the areas in the Budget where reductions

could be made, the Board directed the following actions to be taken:

1. All new positions are to be eliminated with the **exception** of:
 - A. **Finance:** one (1) to be added, one (1) full-time temporary to be added to split duties between Purchasing, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners and Personnel;
 - B. **Solid Waste:** One (1) to be added;
 - C. **Emergency Services:** add Fire Inspector, two (2) dispatch positions changed from part-time to full-time;
 - D. **Maintenance:** one (1) housekeeper;
 - E. **Social Services:** one (1) interpreter at \$23,000 and one (1) security position
2. All new vehicles are to be deleted from all departmental budgets;
3. All new equipment is to be deleted with the exception of one (1) hazmat equipment trailer for Emergency Services;
4. Delete the \$40,000 interest on the shell building from the Economic Development Budget;
5. Twelve (12) new detention facility positions to be eliminated until Fiscal year 2006-2007;
6. Tax Department to verify the overall tax collection rate is going to be ninety-five (95%) percent for the current year, based on vehicles, personal and real property; **and**
7. All departments are asked to find three to four (3-4%) percent cut from their 2005-2006 budget proposals in order to achieve a tax rate of seventy-three (\$.73) cents.

Announcement Regarding Action Taken on New Prison:

Commissioner Memory announced the new State Prison in the Tabor City area had been moved to Columbus County Water and Sewer District V, legislatively, on June 22, 2005.

Final Results of Budget Workshop:

After additional discussion was conducted relative to areas of the budget where cuts could be made, the final decision of the Board is as follows:

1. All items agreed upon previously will stand; **and**
2. Administration to go back to the Department Heads and ask them to cut three to four (3-4%) percent, or as much as possible, from their budget, in order to achieve a seventy-three (\$.73) cents tax rate.

Budget Workshop Scheduled:

Chairman Jacobs announced the next Budget Workshop would be scheduled for Wednesday, June 29, 2005, at 6:00 P.M., to be held in the Dempsey B. Herring Courthouse Annex, 112 West Smith Street, Whiteville, North Carolina 28472.

Budget Workshop Closed:

At 8:17 P.M., this Budget Workshop was closed.

APPROVED:

JUNE B. HALL, Clerk to Board

SAMMIE JACOBS, Chairman

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