

**COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**BUDGET WORKSHOP**

**Thursday, May 31, 2007**

**7:00 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 holding a Budget Workshop.

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

Sammie Jacobs, **Chairman**  
James E. Prevatte, **Vice Chairman**  
Amon E. McKenzie (Arrived: 7:09 P.M.)  
Bill Memory  
Ricky Bullard  
Ronald Gore  
Lynwood Norris

**APPOINTEES PRESENT:**

Jimmy Varner, **County Manager**  
Steven W. Fowler, **County Attorney**  
June B. Hall, **Clerk to Board**  
Leo Hunt, **Interim Finance Officer**

**OTHERS in ATTENDANCE:**

Gail Edwards, Executive Assistant to Manager  
Paulette Varnam, Paralegal to County Attorney  
Leroy Sellers, Public Utilities Director  
Amanda Davis, Administrative Assistant

**BUDGET WORKSHOP CALLED to ORDER:**

At 7:00 P.M., Chairman Jacobs called the May 31, 2007 Budget Workshop to order, and stated the following:

1. This is a Budget Workshop conducted by the Board of Commissioners and the staff and management of various departments of Columbus County;
2. This is not a Public Forum and is not intended for public input. There will be a Public Hearing held at another date when the public will have comments and input into various items of interest;
3. There will not be any formal or binding vote on any item and anything that is agreed upon by majority of the Commissioners will be subject to further handling at a later date in a formal manner;
4. We should also understand that many hours of hard work has been put into this Budget to this point, many hours by many people from all departments in the County Government;
5. We, as Commissioners, must also understand that these hardworking career people have been working with their departments and we must understand that they should know what it takes to make their departments work and function best to deliver services to the citizens of Columbus County;
6. We, as Commissioners, should want to help in any way that we can in order to make their jobs easier and arrive at a Budget solution that a majority of us can live with;
7. In this framework, we will now ask that our County Manager, and his financial staff, deliver us the facts as they have them along with all of the Budget possibilities that are available to us as Commissioners; **and**
8. We want to hear both the good and bad news as it relates to this Budget.

**COUNTY MANAGER'S OVERVIEW of 2007-2008 PROPOSED OPERATING BUDGET:**

Jim Varner, County Manager, presented the following information on the 2007-2008 Proposed Operating Budget.

**Overview of items included in Budget:**

- \$266,000 (soft cost) additional debt service payment-Detention Center(\$2.5 million)
- New positions -
  - \$109,916 4 Detention positions to staff new jail addition
  - \$27,557 1 Drug Detective
  - \$24,862 1 ORC operator for the POTW
- Renovations of county-owned buildings -
  - \$25,000 Courthouse carpet/window casings

○	\$80,000	Administration Elevator
○	\$23,600	Replace roof and new central unit at Miller Building
○	\$75,000	Old Tax Office renovations
○	\$65,000	Pave Veterans, Families First and Sheriff's Office Parking lots
○	\$13,500	Replace Roof at HUD Building
	<hr/>	
	\$282,100	<b>TOTAL</b>

- \$5.4 Million Medicaid appropriation - same as 06/07 fiscal year capped funding. Additional MEDICAID relief, if any at all, will not be known until possibly mid June.
- \$295,000 in Contingency Fund
- \$100,000 in Election increases (2008 Election Year)
- \$40,069 for POTW (Publicly Owned Treatment Works) Budget. This is new this fiscal year.
- \$460,000 in fuel

**Items Not Included:**

- Funds for possible re-districting - costs unknown at this time
- Funds for structural engineer fees to evaluate Courthouse - \$63,000
- Paving of service road to jail - estimated cost - \$11,000
- Funds for Miller Building renovations - \$45,000
- No increase in trash can use fees to offset Waste Management's CPI increase of 2.7% for residential pickup and an increase in their fuel surcharge from a monthly average of 8% to an estimated 8.5% increase. These two (2) items equate to a \$6.00 increase in fees for county and municipal residents fees from \$193.00 to \$199.00 for county residents and \$106.00 to \$112.00 for municipal residents. Again, staff did not increase the trash can user fee to reflect these costs.
- Requested increases in capital outlay from school systems and college -
  - Columbus County Schools - requested \$9,006,000 - allocated \$390,000
  - Whiteville City Schools - requested \$102,978 - allocated \$95,000
  - Southeastern Community College - requested \$383,000 - allocated \$100,000

**New/Increased Requests for Special Appropriations:**

- \$15,000 County Rope Rescue Team (new)
- \$159,766 Forestry Service (current year funding \$146,644 - difference of \$13,122)
- \$17,444 Cape Fear Council of Governments (current funding \$15,048 - difference \$2,396)

**PRESENTATION of GRAPHS:**

Mr. Varner presented the following graphical information:

1. **Employees Benefits, with COLA - Total \$25,395,755:**

Salaries	64%
Salaries Part Time	9%
FICA	6%
Retirement	3%
Longevity	1%
401-K	2%
Insurance	14%
Retirees Insurance	1%
Christmas Bonus	0%
2. **General Fund Total Employees Benefits FY 07/08 - \$20,762,766:**

Salaries	71%
Salaries Part Time	0%
FICA	6%
Retirement	4%
Longevity	1%
401-K	2%
Insurance	15%
Retirees Insurance	1%
Christmas Bonus	0%
3. **General Fund Revenues (Revenue by Source) - \$55,245,278:**

Ad Valorem Taxes		\$27,322,595
Sales Tax		\$9,062,831
Sales and Services		\$1,813,471
Intergovernmental		\$15,219,807
Investment Earnings		\$750,000
Other Miscellaneous		\$1,076,574
4.	<b>Columbus County Expenditures by Object for Fiscal year 07/08 - \$76,292,061:</b>	
	Salaries and Wages	33% \$25,443,499
	Capital Outlay	1% \$733,253
	Other Operating	47% \$35,510,734
	Public School Capital	2% \$1,767,655
	Public School Current	10% \$7,385,016
	Debt	7% \$5,451,904
5.	<b>Expenditures by Object FY 07/08 - \$76,292,061):</b>	
	Education	12% \$9,152,671
	Debt Service	7% \$5,451,904
	Human Services	39% \$29,205,259
	General Government	9% \$6,958,479
	Public Safety**	15% \$11,794,317
	Other*	18% \$13,729,431

**\*Other:** includes transportation, economic/physical development, culture and recreation, utility and miscellaneous expenses

**\*\*Public Safety:** contains disbursement to fire departments, ambulance and rescue also

6.	<b>Total General Fund Expenditures for 07/08 - \$55,245,278:</b>	
	General Government	13% \$6,958,479
	Public Safety	17% \$9,263,883
	Economic and Physical Development	2% \$1,066,905
	Human Services	43% \$24,365,130
	Cultural and Recreational	3% \$1,727,093
	Education	17% \$9,152,671
	Special Appropriations	2% \$1,081,818
	Miscellaneous	1% \$452,609
	Debt Services	1% \$486,488
	Transportation	1% \$690,202

Mr. Varner requested Leo Hunt, Interim Finance Director, to present an overview of the 2007 - 2008 Proposed Operating Budget. Mr. Hunt stated the following:

1. Columbus County received a letter last year from the Local Government Commission stating that our Fund Balance was down to approximately thirteen (13%) percent;
2. In the current year, \$2.9 million were used from the Fund Balance to balance the budget;
3. The \$2.9 million have been reduced down to \$2.5 million;
4. If the entirety of this money is spent, Columbus County's Fund Balance will be down to eight and 57/100 (8.57%) percent; **and**
5. We need to bring the Fund Balance up.

**PRESENTATION by SHERIFF CHRISTOPHER BATTEN:**

Sheriff Christopher Batten stated the following:

1. I am a sworn officer of the law and must abide by the Constitution of North Carolina and the United States, and I have been elected by the people;
2. It is my duty to protect the citizens of Columbus County, and in order for me to fulfill my duties as Sheriff, I need the necessary operational material to do so;
3. I am here tonight to clarify some concerns that have been made known;
4. The additional four (4) positions that I have requested are necessary to open the new jail;
5. We presently have twenty-seven (27) employees in the Jail and we need thirty-two (32) employees to fully staff the new jail;
6. Without the additional four (4) positions, I will not open the new jail;
7. Shortly after I became Sheriff, due to under staffing, we had an incident where a jailer was

- overtook by an inmate and injured;
8. The patrolling of 74/76 is done by drug detectives which has proven to be very effective, and I have provided to you a listing of drugs that have been confiscated as a result of this activity;
  9. The presence of four (4) deputies at a school incident was due to two (2) of the officers living within close proximity;
  10. The prolonged period of time spent with a citizen on the Columbus County and Brunswick County line was due to a dispatch by E-911 of a homeless individual wandering the road, and the length of time it took Brunswick County to send an officer to pick her up;
  11. When I first came on board in 2002, there were eighty-eight sworn officers of the law in my department;
  12. It was my opinion that there were some dead areas in Columbus County that were not being patrolled adequately, and I added three (3) more sworn officers;
  13. Since the addition of the three (3) officers, I added eight (8) more, and then four (4) more, which makes a total of one hundred three (103) sworn officers;
  14. The Personnel Department reflects one hundred eleven (111), but on my roster, which includes everyone, I have only one hundred three (103);
  15. I included ten (10) vehicles in my budget, which I need badly, but the County Manager removed the ten (10) vehicles;
  16. The majority of our vehicles have exceeded their useful life span, and the remainder of our vehicles are very near to their useful life span;
  17. After our vehicles reach a certain mileage traveled range, repair charges can be staggering in order to keep them on the road;
  18. I do not pad my budget in any way, I only include what I need;
  17. We need adequate staffing at the jail, and I will not put my staff in harms way;
  19. There are four (4) vehicles for the school system in which the school system pays one half (½) of the lease price, and we need these badly;
  20. If these items are allowed to be deleted from my budget, you will need to make a note of this, so when the time of need arrives, I will have to approach the Board for your direction;
  21. If anyone would like to discuss any matter with me, or has any concerns, please contact me and I will be glad to discuss these with you;
  22. In order to you to fully understand what our deputies do, I invite anyone who so desires to do so, to come and ride with one of our deputies and witness their activity first hand.

Commissioner Gore asked Sheriff Batten if there was any way he could re-structure his staff so as not to add any new employees. Sheriff Batten stated no he could not.

#### **PARKS and RECREATION DISCUSSION:**

Vice Chairman Prevatte asked Carol Worrell, Parks and Recreation Director, what the PARTF Grant Match was. Ms. Worrell stated the following:

1. This is a grant the Board had approved for me to apply for, in which the County will have to spend the money up-front and then would be reimbursed up to a maximum of \$49,823;
2. This grant will be used for two (2) lighted ballfields with press box/concession stand/bathroom facilities to be constructed at the Riegelwood Community Park which is owned by the County;
3. We have three (3) years to complete this project; **and**
4. The amount budgeted is one third (1/3) of the County match.

Vice Chairman Prevatte asked Ms. Worrell what the Fire Ant Grant was for. Mr. Worrell replied stating she had written an essay in which she was awarded \$2,500.00. The check was written to Columbus County and these funds could be utilized for the upcoming Fire Ant Festival.

#### **LIBRARY DISCUSSION:**

Commissioner Bullard asked Morris Pridgen, Library Director, why there was a difference of \$30,000 in the Salaries and Wages line item. Mr. Pridgen stated they had placed the \$8,242 Part-time Salaries and Wages in with the Regular Salaries and Wages. Commissioner Bullard stated that would still leave a \$21,000 difference. Mr. Pridgen stated this was the COLA increase and he had an employee out on Workers Compensation.

Vice Chairman Prevatte asked Mr. Pridgen why the increase in Contracted Services and what was it for. Mr. Pridgen replied stating this was for software, vendors, housekeeping and pest control.

Commissioner Gore asked Mr. Pridgen why the large fluctuation on the Books line item from current year to fiscal year 2008. Mr. Hunt, Interim Finance Officer, stated there was an error in this line item that had not been corrected.

Commissioner Gore asked Mr. Pridgen why the increase in office supplies. Mr. Pridgen stated he had been advised to include a portion of the Capital Outlay monies in this line item.

**COMMENT by LEO HUNT:**

Everyone needs to keep in mind that what is cut out of this budget, must stay out due to the fact there will be no additional funds available.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

At 8:37 P.M., Chairman Jacobs stated this Budget Workshop was adjourned.

**APPROVED:**

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**JUNE B. HALL, Clerk to Board**

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**SAMMIE JACOBS, Chairman**