

Meeting of the Johnston County Board of Commissioners

April 12, 2005

The Johnston County Board of Commissioners met in special session Tuesday, April 12, 2005, at 6:00 p.m. in the Human Resources Training Room, Smithfield, North Carolina. The following members were present:

Present: Cookie Pope, Chairman, Allen L. Mims, Jr., Jeffrey P. Carver, W. Ray Woodall, DeVan Barbour and Tony Braswell.

Absent: Wade M. Stewart, Vice Chairman

Also Present: Rick J. Hester, County Manager, April N. Byrd, Clerk to the Board, John R. Massey, Finance Officer, J. Mark Payne, County Attorney, and Deva C. Holt, Deputy Clerk.

The Chairman called the meeting to order and the following business was transacted:

1. Presentations - County Departments and Agencies

The following County Departments and Agencies made presentations to the Board:

A) **Economic Development**

Michael de Sherbinin gave a brief history of the Economic Development Department, and noted that today the organization has a staff of three and a thirteen member Board of Directors. The board consists of 1 commissioner, 2 sitting mayors, 2 former mayors, 2 bankers, 2 attorneys, 1 town council member, 1 agri-business manager, and other retail and service business owners. He noted the board's diversity is a wonderful resource to the office and the County.

Mr. de Sherbinin stated the Job Skills Training Center broke ground in August 2004, and is scheduled to open June 8, 2005. The purpose of the 30,000 square foot venue is to attract and retain life science industries in Johnston County. The training center will hold classes, and individuals can earn Associate degrees in fields such as Biotechnology. The training center will also serve to update the skills of the workforce, and give individuals every opportunity to prevent a skills gap from occurring in the County.

He spoke highly of several economic development announcements made in the County in the past six months including the Novo-Nordisk and Hospira expansions, and Sysco's plan to build and operate food service distribution center in Selma. The expansions and new construction have created over 1000 new jobs.

Mr. de Sherbinin thanked other County Departments and Agencies for their cooperation with his office.

B) **Facilities Services**

Jerry Burton, Director of Facilities Services, thanked the Board for the opportunity to discuss the role his department plays in the operation of the County. Currently, the department has a staff of 29 employees, with 9 employees in maintenance and grounds, and 20 employees in housekeeping, supervised by Larry Stanley, Housekeeping Superintendent.

Mr. Burton emphasized the department strives to work toward cost reductions, and mentioned a few examples of these efforts. During the past year, electrical and plumbing costs have been reduced by \$20,000 by hiring an in-house employee to perform the majority of this work. All lighting in the courthouse has been upgraded, resulting in an energy cost savings of \$12,000 annually. Staff replaced two 15 ton air units at the Livestock Arena at a savings of almost \$8,000 by performing the replacement in-house.

Mr. Burton pointed out that although the workload has definitely increased in the past ten years, no positions have been added to the Facilities Services staff. The square footage of buildings to maintain has increased 46%, not counting the new Agriculture Center that will be open in late summer 2005. The maintenance and ground staff currently maintains approximately 24.5 acres; an additional 11 acres will be added once the Agriculture Center nears completion.

In response to a question from Commissioner DeVan Barbour regarding needed improvements in the future, Mr. Burton responded the roof on the old section of the courthouse building is in need of repair, and the request will be in the 05-06 budget.

Chairman Cookie Pope applauded Mr. Burton and the Facilities Services staff for continuing to look for ways to be more efficient.

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C) Emergency Management

Dewayne West, Emergency Management Director, stated the mission statement of his department is as follows: "To provide leadership and support to minimize the impact of disasters and other emergencies on the health, safety and property of the citizens of Johnston County, their businesses and environment through a comprehensive, integrated emergency management program."

In order to carry out the mission statement, the Emergency Management Department interacts with 41 different groups on an annual basis: various administrative and policy groups, Fire Departments and EMS units, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, State and Federal agencies, and numerous others.

Mr. West explained to the Board his department is divided into three areas: Emergency Medical Services, Fire Marshal's Office, and Emergency Management.

- Emergency Medical Services - This area of the Department is responsible for the audit and review of all emergency treatment given to patients in the County. Staff must verify that EMS personnel is providing quality care. A considerable amount of time has been spent on the PreMis reporting system that the State now requires. This system pushes data up through the field to the State to be analyzed by them as well.
- Fire Marshal's Office - The Fire Marshal's Office is responsible for commercial plan reviews, arson investigations, and fire prevention promotion. The Fire Marshal also serves as a liason with and provides support to the volunteer fire departments. Johnston County is the first in the nation to use the "Fire House Reporting System" on a web based application. The system allows data downloads on the way to fires, and reports to be completed in the field. The target date is May 15th for the system to go live throughout the County. Mr. West noted that former Fire Marshal Paul Whitehurst had left the County to work with the Town of Smithfield. A replacement has been hired, and will begin employment April 25th.
- Emergency Management - This area serves as the planning and coordination group of the Department. Currently, the group is working on eight to ten plans. The Hazard Mitigation Plan is complete, and Mr. West thanked the departments, agencies, and towns for their cooperation in the effort. Staff is working on others including a Communication plan, Bio-terrorism plan in cooperation with the Hospital and Health Department, a re-write of the Emergency Operations Plan to satisfy State and Federal requirements, and numerous others. The Department hopes to apply for the Emergency Management Accreditation Program in the next six months.

In response to a question from Commissioner Tony Braswell, Mr. West responded the Emergency Management Department has a total of 7 employees.

Commissioner DeVan Barbour questioned if response time was adequate in high growth areas.

Mr. West stated there is consideration for possible additional stations in the future in these high growth areas, however, there are no definite plans yet. Emergency Management does assist with the long term planning for the fire and rescue stations.

D) Technology Services

Terry Ellis, Technology Services Director, explained the merger of the Management Information Systems (MIS) Department and the Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Department in April 2004 resulted in the creation of the Technology Services Department. He stated the motto of the new department is to be the "Solution Center", and to accomplish this in a positive, cost effective manner.

Mr. Ellis briefly explained some of the Department's responsibilities including computer guidance, hardware acquisition, software evaluation, network maintenance, and the provision of telephone, e-mail and internet services. The Department backs up financial data for various departments, maintains the GIS mapping system, manages the County website, responds to hardware failures, assists with software application, and performs numerous other tasks.

In the past year, staff reviewed the billing for the County phone system, and recovered over \$50,000 in redundancy. Technology Services has also increased network security by automating virus protection services and applying spam filtering methods. Mr. Ellis noted future goals include increased training opportunities for County

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employees, centralized management of the computer system, and software upgrades for document scanning.

County Manager Rick Hester noted the Technology Services Department had a major role in two projects that recently won awards from the NC Association of County Commissioners for their innovative designs.

E) County Attorney

County Attorney Mark Payne informed the Board he handles litigation claims against the County, and claims brought by the County for all departments except Child Support, and Social Services. He stated, in his opinion, the County is receiving quality legal services from Attorney Andy Holland, who represents these two departments. For the past two to three years, tax foreclosure work has been contracted to Attorney Lu Starling, and paid for primarily from the fees attached to tax foreclosure collections. He further noted the County out-sources certain specialized representation, such as bond counsel, and may out-source other isolated representation from time to time when his work load becomes too demanding.

Mr. Payne stated that he recently compared how the County ranks with other like-sized counties with salaried legal staffs. Of the 24 counties in NC with salaried legal staffs, 18 are of roughly Johnston County's size or larger, and all 18 have two or more staff attorneys.

He noted that there used to be a budget item in the legal budget to cover unanticipated costs from judicial decisions. The budget item has been eliminated, and noted since that time, he could not recall an expense that would have come out of the fund.

Mr. Payne emphasized the importance of spending time in the present to work with departments to avoid potential problems in the future. He informed the Board of his plans to hire a part-time paralegal in the upcoming fiscal year from the Legal Department- contract services line item, and mentioned the purchase of case management software. He further noted there will be a time when it becomes more cost effective to perform tax foreclosures in-house, and at that time, he would need to hire a full-time paralegal to assist with the workload.

F) Public Utilities

Tim Broome, Public Utilities Director, explained to the Board his department is divided into four service areas: Water Supply, Wastewater, Solid Waste, and Engineering and Environmental Protection. He noted several recent accomplishments and challenges in each service area.

- Water Supply Services - Accomplishments include successful conversion to radio read meters, completion of first design-build water plant project in NC, construction of 12 water districts in eight years, successful and highly cost effective installation of SCADA system to monitor tank levels at booster pump stations, and other accomplishments. Challenges and potential issues in Water Supply Services include funding for the next water treatment plant expansion, funding for transmission improvements to meet peak demands, identifying and permitting water supply sources to serve the County's needs after 2020, and complying with changing EPA quality regulations.
- Wastewater Services - Accomplishments include completion of a 2.0 mgd Wastewater Treatment Plant expansion, relocation of the bio-solids processing facilities to the landfill, operation of a regionally recognized reclaimed water system, successful installation of the SCADA system, elimination of major infiltration in Smithfield-Selma area interceptors, and other accomplishments. Challenges and potential issues in Wastewater Services include permitting and funding for the next Wastewater Treatment Plant expansion, funding for wastewater transmission facilities for new/ expanding sewer service areas, and expansion and funding of the reclaimed water system versus the purchase of nitrogen credit.
- Solid Waste Services - Accomplishments include the creative expansion of C&D areas, creative expansion of lined landfill, and automatic scale operation for contract haulers. Challenges and potential issues in Solid Waste Services include possibly outgrowing the convenience site collection program, finding alternative funding sources for the convenience site collection program, changing the operation permit to allow out of county waste, implementing a wood waste ban at the landfill, and recycling programs such as household hazardous waste and phone book programs.
- Engineering and Environmental Protection Services - Accomplishments include managing \$14.5 million per year in new construction, development of final two water districts, innovative planning and

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negotiation for future water supply sources and wastewater projects, and other accomplishments. Challenges and potential issues in Engineering and Environmental Protection Services include continued outsourcing of engineering and construction inspection tasks, updating utilities GIS data, overcoming myth that County is responsible for stormwater problems, and planning to stay ahead of growth.

G) Housing Assistance Payments Program (HAPP)

Melody Gates, HAPP Director, informed the Board that the mission statement of HAPP is "To assist eligible families in securing housing offering good living conditions in safe, low-poverty neighborhoods at affordable costs and which adequately meets the needs of all family members including those with special needs." Currently, the program assists 619 families with rent and utilities. \$3.4 million in Federal funds flow annually into the local economy to pay rent on behalf of very-low income families. Federal funds also fully support staff and operations in the amount of \$415,000.

Ms. Gates explained the Section 8 Voucher Program, which requires families to pay approximately 30 percent of adjusted monthly income for rent and utilities. This program provides assistance quickly, allows families a choice of housing and anonymity, and disperses families throughout the community instead of creating "projects" or site selection problems. The program is relatively inexpensive to operate.

In response to recent budget cuts, HAPP has taken the following actions: 1) an across-the-board reduction in the maximum amount of rent the agency will pay, 2) increased scrutiny in initial rents to owners and subsequent rent increases, and 3) implementation of an automated Rents Comparable Program to avoid above-market rents. HAPP has also increased income matching efforts by using the Employment Security Commission to check for unreported wages. Heightened awareness of fraud activities has led to 50 re-payment agreements. Also, HAPP raised the minimum rent from \$25 to \$50, the maximum amount that HUD will allow.

In response to a question from Commissioner DeVan Barbour, Ms. Gates stated a minimum of 619 inspections are performed annually. Initial inspections are completed before a home comes under the program, and often, staff receives requests to perform inspections other than those regularly scheduled. A number of houses do not pass the first time, and therefore, a second inspection is performed.

H) Sheriff's Department

Sheriff Steve Bizzell stated his department consists of 170 employees committed to ensuring both the Sheriff's Office and the Jail operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. He noted deputies are driving approximately 6,000 miles per day, and using over 12,000 gallons of gas per month. As a result of rising gas prices, fuel costs increased by \$5,000 in March 2005 alone. The Sheriff's Office is receiving about 150 orders for arrest, warrants for arrests, and civil papers daily to be served in the County. It costs taxpayers approximately \$19.33 per minute to operate the Sheriff's Office and the Jail.

Sheriff Bizzell noted the Jail is designed to hold 191 inmates, and currently is averaging approximately 215 inmates per day. Medical costs for inmates have risen from \$483 per day last year to \$1,127 per day this year. This amount does not include medical costs for Federal inmates. The Sheriff's Department is under contract with the US Marshall's Service to house 60 federal inmates at any given time, and is currently receiving revenue for this purpose in the amount of \$74,000 per month. He noted that since becoming Sheriff in 1998, he has not added any new employees to the Jail.

He informed the Board the Sheriff's Office is divided into five divisions: Patrol, Civil, Criminal Investigations, Narcotics, and Specialty Teams.

- Patrol - This division consists of 40 deputies that work 12 hour shifts. The deputies are receiving a call for service once every 15 minutes, 24 hours a day.
- Civil - This division consists of 21 deputies total. Ten serve civil papers, transport inmates to the hospital, and mental facilities, assist funeral escorts and the Patrol Division when needed. Seven deputies serve as school resource officers, and four deputies as bailiffs.
- Criminal Investigations - This division consists of seven major crimes detectives, six property crime detectives, and one crime scene investigator. The biggest problems right now are identity theft, internet

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crimes, sex offenses with children, and gang activity.

- Narcotics - This division consists of seven narcotics officers and two uniformed deputies. Sheriff Bizzell noted the tremendous increase in meth use and meth labs, and that Johnston County is ranked number two in the State for meth. He emphasized the Department is very proactive in its focus to identify sources of illegal drug trade in the County.
- Specialty Teams - This division includes the Special Tactics and Response Team, Search and Rescue Team, and Swift Water Rescue Team. The specialty teams deal with hostage situations, stand-offs, locating lost people, and water rescues. He pointed out the Swift Water Rescue Team is one of only 23 teams in the State.

Sheriff Bizzell also noted the Department employs 11 dispatchers. He informed the Board that a substantial amount of equipment has been purchased with seized drug money including mobile laptops for 56 vehicles, and other software upgrades. In regards to the 05-06 budget, he stated the request includes an increase for fuel and medical expenditures for the Jail.

There being no further business, Commissioner W. Ray Woodall moved the Board adjourn. Commissioner Tony Braswell seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

Cookie Pope, Chairman

April N. Byrd, Clerk to the Board