

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
FEBRUARY 17, 2014**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a special meeting with the Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors and staff on Monday, February 17, 2014 at 12:00 Noon at the Pineapple Cafe.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jeff Dixon, Chairman
Joseph S. Winslow, Jr., Vice-Chairman
Cecil Perry
Dr. William R. Sterritt
Gary G. White
Frankie Meads

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Lloyd E. Griffin, III

OTHERS PRESENT:

Rodney Bunch, Interim County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Karen Jennings, Clerk to the Board
Steve Harris, Pasquotank SWCD Chairman
Maurice Berry, Pasquotank SWCD Supervisor
Dwane Hinson, Pasquotank SWCD Technician
Dianne Watts, Pasquotank SWCD Secretary
Rodney Johnson, Albemarle RC&D Council

Mr. Steve Harris, Pasquotank Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Chairman, welcomed everyone. SWCD Supervisor Maurice Berry gave the invocation and lunch was served. Following lunch SWCD Technician Dwane Hinson updated the Board on several projects on which he said he would like the Board's input. He stated many of these issues are very important to the economic development of the county. Mr. Hinson stated the SWCD is one of the few organizations that are routinely invited on public property to help solve resource problems. As a result SWCD is working on many watershed scale projects and is at the point it needs the Board's input in order to carry them out.

Mr. Hinson said SWCD has been involved in the Little River Project for over a year and applied for three grants to work in different areas of the river. He said the estuary habitat grant was not funded for the upper Little River which would have been used to redesign and filter the drainage systems, clear and snag the river, and work with buffers. A coastal recreational fishing license grant was not secured for the southern part of the river to build fishery habitat and build a water quality model to monitor what they were doing. Mr. Hinson said an EPA grant was funded which gives authority to start setting up other grants and doing some initial planning. He explained that they have not received any grants to put anything on the ground yet, but they are still working. He stated that significant efforts are required in working with individuals on plans and budgets. He said one of the things that is imperative in this effort is a 300 foot buffer on each side of the river. He stated this is very important for the water quality of the river. He noted it is also very important that many grants require a match. He said if tax relief for the property owners in Pasquotank and Perquimans Counties in this area can be provided it would be very significant to be able to claim the property value of the buffer areas to offset some grant monies. He explained that SWCD cannot approach any of these property owners yet because there is no mechanism set up by the county to deal with the taxation. He stated that participation by the property owners would be voluntary and they believe there would be a 90% to 95% participation rate. He said all of the data and maps are prepared, but county involvement is needed to set up the mechanism. He asked for the county's help in resolving this.

Mr. Rodney Johnson added that up until now, RC&D has been using some of its grant-writing money to write two grants for the Little River. He said there is no further grant-writing money therefore Pasquotank and Perquimans Counties will need to come together and provide about \$2,500 so they can get started writing some more grants. He noted that this will probably be needed before July 1. Mr. Hinson said the soil and water districts are developing the technical data, doing the surveys and designs, and putting together the budgets. He added that the grant-writing is specifically coming from RC&D.

Mr. Hinson said another problem in the county he would like to discuss that is very significant in maintaining drainage is alligator weed. He stated that maintenance of the drainage is a major concern and in most of their projects they are improving the rate of drainage and putting filters and buffers on the drainage systems to protect water quality. He said alligator weed has the opposite effect. He explained that much of the area along Little River and in the upper watersheds is starting to become contaminated with alligator weed. He said it is taking over the ditches and gradually strangling the drainage even though it is cleaning up the water. He stated that this issue is going to have to be addressed. He said they have created budgets for several areas and it could cost up to \$15,000 to treat each area. He recommended the creation of special use water management districts or some type of mechanism to get the community together because this impacts everybody and all of the ditches have to be treated. SWCD Chairman Steve Harris added that controlling alligator weed is a continuous process because it is not going away. Mr. Hinson said it cannot be ignored because it will stifle all the drainage systems. He asked what the Board of Commissioners would like for SWCD to do other than develop the budgets. He said there needs to be some mechanism to put the community together and get everyone to realize they must have input.

Mr. Hinson stated that SWCD would like for the county to pursue Special Use Water Management Districts and put the community in charge of these areas and let them decide what kind of monies they want to spend on drainage improvements and alligator weed control rather than the community coming to the Board of Commissioners. He said creation of these districts will have to go through the Board of Commissioners. County Attorney Mike Cox stated that creation of the districts will be difficult because easements have been reserved across much of the property that would be included in these districts. He stated that the county would be dealing with not only the current property owners, but also with the predecessors who have reserved easements and their heirs. He suggested that Mr. Hinson meet with him and the County Manager so they can show them some of their work on the districts. Mr. Hinson recommended that the districts be set up and budgets be developed just to get the mechanism in place. He asked for guidance on how to proceed.

Mr. Hinson stated that SWCD recently submitted to the Board a report on Knobbs Creek. He said he would like to emphasize that Knobbs Creek has inherent issues which have been recognized for quite some time. He said these issues include flooding and all of the reports state that some of the houses need to be elevated. He stated that something that has not been emphasized is the need for maintenance. He said Knobbs Creek needs annual maintenance including clearing and snagging and removing debris from culverts. He stated that Knobbs Creek is the heart and soul of the Elizabeth City area and SWCD has offered the technical assistance to go and evaluate some of these things, however the Board of Commissioners needs to deal with the issues and make an effort to set up the mechanism because somehow it has to be paid for. He said if Knobbs Creek is allowed to continue to decay every year, eventually there will be more flooding whenever there is a storm. He stated that maintenance will solve a lot of the problems. He said it will not take care of the major flood, but will keep the small storms from being an issue.

Mr. Hinson noted that all of the projects introduced today will get the county ahead of the curve, otherwise it will cost a lot more money to repair the problems later.

County Attorney Mike Cox advised that the Knobbs Creek District has been established, but there is no fee or maintenance plan.

Chairman Dixon stated that the Knobbs Creek project should be a partnership between Pasquotank County and Elizabeth City, and funding will be a huge challenge. He suggested on the first two projects that SWCD come back to the Board with hard numbers that the Board may be able to include as a line item in the budget. The SWCD could then prioritize the areas to be addressed each year. He said by assessing drainage district fees each year, it would take years to collect sufficient funds to do any substantial repairs or maintenance. He added that it appears a pot of money will first be needed to do the repairs.

Mr. Harris pointed out that Knobbs Creek will eventually fill up after two or three hundred years and the water will go somewhere else to drain. He said even though there was no major catastrophe last year, Knobbs Creek still needs to be maintained yearly because the flow of water has been slowed down. When regular rainfall drains through it, sedimentation falls out further impeding the drainage. He said old topographic maps will show this.

Mr. Hinson thanked the Board for its input. He said SWCD looks forward to bringing something to the Board at a future work session. He stated that the alligator weed issue needs to be addressed this year.

Mr. Johnson reported to the Board that RC&D is alive and well. He said they are however having to charge fees to write grants and develop projects since they lost federal funding. He went on to say that when the county comes to RC&D with a project, they will need some funding from the county to get started. He said he would like to welcome Commissioner Frankie Meads to the RC&D Council and would also like to thank Commissioner Gary White for serving on the Council for the last couple of years. He thanked the board for its support.

Mr. Harris stated that there are five counties in the Albemarle Soil & Water Conservation District and they will be having a district meeting on April 10 at 6:30 PM at the Weeksville Lions Club. He welcomed any members of the Board who would like to attend. He thanked the Board for its support through the county budget.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:30 PM.


CLERK TO THE BOARD


CHAIRMAN