

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
FEBRUARY 28, 2020**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners held a retreat on Friday, February 28, 2020 at Montero's, 414 North McArthur Street, Elizabeth City.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jeff Dixon, Chairman
Lloyd E. Griffin, III, Vice-Chairman
Cecil Perry
Frankie Meads
Charles Jordan
Barry Overman
Sean Lavin

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Sparty Hammett, County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Sheri Small, Finance Officer
Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board
Hartley Askew, Deputy Clerk to the Board
Robert Boyce, VFD Coordinator

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 AM by Chairman Jeff Dixon. Chairman Dixon welcomed everyone present.

1. FY2020-21 BUDGET:

Finance Officer Sheri Small provided a list of outstanding debt and reviewed general fund revenues and expenditures.

County Manager Hammett provided a list of budget challenges for FY2020-21, which includes:

- Local Government Retirement System increases for the next three fiscal years, (1.2% annually – approximate increase for FY2020-21 -\$160,000).
- Potential increases in workers compensation and general liability insurance.
- School capital needs.
- Water Department budget needs resulting from Water and Sewer Master Plan recommendations.
- Reappraisal costs higher than anticipated.

Mr. Hammett provided his top three budget priorities for FY2020-21:

- Employee Compensation.
- Sheriff's Office – Drug Investigators and Canine.
- Fire Service.

Mr. Hammett asked the Board the following questions:

- Does the BOC support directing the County Manager to propose a no tax increase budget? *Unanimous consensus.*

2. FY2019-20 GOALS UPDATE:

Mr. Hammett provided the following FY2019-20 goals update:

FY2019-20 Budget Goals:

- Review the County's fees to determine if the fees cover costs. *Fees were reviewed. Planning fees were increased in May; Inspections fee increases will be recommended in April.*
- Develop a no tax increase budget. *A no tax increase budget was developed and approved by the Board.*

- Develop a phased Compensation Study Implementation Plan based on state averages and lateral increases for employees using their current pay step. *Compensation Study was implemented for Solid Waste and Water Departments in FY2019-20; General Fund departments will be implemented in FY2020-21 (based on funding availability).*

Planning and Inspections Goals:

- Amend the following subdivision ordinances:
 - Family Subdivision definition and procedure
 - Expedited subdivision standards
 - Street and stormwater bonding requirements*Completed – ordinances amended in November.*
- Conduct street assessments and notify property owners/developers of their subdivision's status and maintenance options. *To be completed by June 30th.*
- Adopt the International Property Maintenance Code to address nuisance complaints. *Presented to Special Projects Committee on April 30, 2019. Committee did not approve moving forward.*

Fire Services Goals:

- Reclassify a vacant Building Inspector position to serve as Pasquotank County Fire Marshal. *Completed – new Fire Marshal hired in September.*
- Identify a recommended means of Fire Services delivery for the Fiscal Year 2020-21 Budget. *To be presented during Retreat.*
- Change the Fire Fleet Management policy to require the sale of replaced fire trucks, unless an operational need is identified to retain the old truck. *Completed.*

Information Technology Goals:

- Identify funding in the FY2019-20 Budget to expand GPS tracking for all non-public safety vehicles. *Due to FY2019-20 funding constraints, the goal was partially met – GPS was added to three vehicles (in addition to Solid Waste and Water departments), with the goal of adding GPS to additional vehicles in the FY2020-21 budget.*
- Expand the use of new technology based on cost versus benefits and funding availability. *New Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system was implemented at EMS in December; we are developing a RFP for VoIP system for the Courthouse Complex, Solid Waste and Water departments. In addition, an online paperless information system for permitting and citizen request/complaint tracking is still being considered – this project will extend into FY2020-21.*

Water Department Goals:

- Move forward with the plan to address the wellfield issues. *Wellfield issues are being addressed; variable frequency drives have been installed in two of the four wells.*
- Increase water rates from \$4.55 to \$6.00/thousand to address rate consistency in four identified areas within Elizabeth City. *Completed.*
- Develop a Request for Proposal to retain a consultant to conduct a Water and Sewer Master Plan. *RFP developed, consultant selected, and Master Plan is in process.*

Sheriff's Office Goals:

- Continue to work with the newly elected Sheriff to help achieve his goals for the future direction of the department. *Administrative Assistant position was added in FY2019-20 Budget. Per request of the Sheriff, the Board approved reclassification of the position to a Deputy. FY2020-21 goal for County Manager's Budget recommendation – two Drug Investigators and a Canine.*

Countywide Drainage Goals:

- Establish a Drainage Advisory Committee to address countywide drainage and water quality issues. *Board approved Drainage Advisory Committee on February 3rd. We actively recruited committee members, and the goal is to have the first meeting in April.*
- Identify funding the FY2019-20 budget to conduct a pilot project for addressing public drainage concerns. *Additional funding was added to Soil and Water budget and first project is being bid.*

Economic Development Goals:

- Pursue industrial site certification for the Pasquotank County Commerce Park through Electricities and the North Carolina Department of Commerce. *Plan to navigate ElectriCities Smart-Site Certification in the 2nd round of submissions (Fall) of 2020.*
- Promote available land in Pasquotank County Commerce Park via the commercial real estate website, LoopNet. *Completed – The Pasquotank County Commerce Park is being promoted on LoopNet and is receiving a lot of “looks” from interested parties. Our industrial park is being promoted in similar fashion as other industrial parks in the Port of Virginia’s Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ 20) designated area.*
- Research, collect, and analyze shell/spec building development to identify the appropriate parameters (size, ceiling height, etc.) and potential private development partners to position the County for future economic development projects. *Completed – analyzed speculative buildings, models for launching these projects, and potential partners. Presenting information at the retreat.*
- Gain site control of all, or a portion of the Tanglewood Megasite through a public-private partnership to promote the site for economic development purposes. *In progress.*

Lobbyist/Legislative Goals:

- Follow-up monthly with our Lobbyist to ensure support of both the NCACC’s legislative goals and Pasquotank County’s local goals. *A minimum of bi-monthly contact follow-up has been conducted.*
- Schedule two Board presentations for our Lobbyist to provide legislative updates and updates on their efforts in pursuing the County’s legislative goals. *First presentation is today.*

2020 Census Goal & Additional Goal:

- Form a Complete County Committee to use local knowledge, influence, and resources to educate and promote the 2020 Census through targeted outreach efforts to help provide an opportunity for everyone in Pasquotank County to be counted. *Completed – Complete County Committee was formed.*
- Branding/Logo was added as an additional goal at the Goals Work Session. *Funding was added to the FY2019-20 budget, receiving a proposal from Bizzell Design (firm currently conducting Wayfinding Study).*

3. PARKS & RECREATION:

County Manager Hammett provided the following history of the consolidation of Parks and Recreation with the City of Elizabeth City:

Prior to consolidation, the County had two full-time employees, four permanent part-time employees, and 15 to 20 part-time seasonal employees. The staff operated five parks, one boardwalk, four camping platforms, and one school facility. The facilities included: Fun Junktion; Mead’s Pool; Sawmill Park; Weeksville Boardwalk; South Park; River Road Sports Complex; and River Road Middle School. When consolidation discussions began, South Park was only a golf driving range and batting cage facility. The second phase of construction for South Park was a joint City/County project scheduled to begin in the fall of 2009 and included: a five-field baseball complex with playground; picnic shelter; walking trails; concession stand; and bathroom facilities. Staffing and operations of the expanded South Park facility was a major factor in the decision to consolidate Parks and Recreation with Elizabeth City.

An August 2009 memo from Jeff Simpson, County Parks and Recreation Director, listed the following positives of consolidating with Elizabeth City: Ability to better maintain facilities and offer more options to the public; and better planning for future facilities, programs and special events. The memo listed the following negatives of consolidation: There would not be a significant cost savings due to the lack of staff being in the same positions and shortage of staff; and either the County or City would lose control of operations.

The first Interlocal Agreement consolidating Parks and Recreation was entered into on April 27, 2010. The Agreement gave management and operation to the City effective July 1, 2010, with an initial term of five years with a funding ratio of – County 55% and City 45%. On June 21, 2010, the Memorandum of Understanding and Supplement to Interlocal Agreement was completed to primarily address the risk management aspects of the consolidated parks and recreation system. The MOU listed the City-owned and County-owned facilities that were subject to the terms of the agreement and included the jointly owned South Park Sports Complex. Meads Pool was not

included under the terms of the Agreement, as a determination was made that it would not be operated by the County for the foreseeable future. The Interlocal Agreement was amended on June 6, 2011 to better define the structure of the P&R Advisory Board and add an additional 7th member recommended by the Board and approved by the City and County.

A second Interlocal Agreement Amendment was entered into on August 13, 2012 to better define procedures for budget adoption by the City and County. Section 4b – Budget/Finance was amended to add the following language: “Each respective governing body shall take official action on the proposed budget for the combined Parks and Recreation Department by June 1 of each year. Should a governing body fail to approve the budget by June 1 of a particular year, the County Manager, City Manager, Board of Commissioners Chairperson and Mayor shall meet within seven (7) days to address and resolve any outstanding issues.

A third Interlocal Agreement Amendment was entered into on April 29, 2014, which amended Section 4 -Budget/Finance and Section 8 - Duration. The most significant change to the Budget/Finance section was the deletion of “The COUNTY shall remit its portion of the budget to the CITY quarterly.” Replacement language follows: “The COUNTY shall be billed for its portion of the operation expenses on a quarterly basis. The CITY shall provide an expense report to the COUNTY with its bill on a quarterly basis.” This amendment strengthened financial oversight by the County.

The term of the initial agreement was 5-years. Duration was amended to make the Interlocal Agreement effective for another 5-years - through June 30, 2020. The Amendment further stated “Prior to March 1, 2019 the CITY and COUNTY shall meet and determine whether this agreement should be extended and to discuss any modifications that may be necessary.” That meeting did not occur. Based upon observation over the last two years and discussions with Commissioners, an additional amendment is needed before the IA is extended.

During the last Interlocal Agreement renewal, the IA was strengthened by requiring quarterly billing of expenses along with an associated expense report. The amendment was a step in the right direction; however, additional oversight is needed as the County pays 55% of the costs. As the Parks and Recreation system expands, including Enfield Park and a Northern Park, the funding for maintenance and operations will continue to increase. The change to quarterly billing along with a detailed expense report, enabled the County to identify expenses which should not be paid by the County. For example, the 2nd quarter of FY2019-20 contained the following:

- Replacement of HVAC Units. (2) gym units, one clubroom unit, and unit for current Senior Center space. Band-Aid fixes are no longer working. Units need to be replaced and ductwork repaired/replaced for operation in building to continue. \$ 85,404;
- Replace all walking boards at entrance, walk to left, straight out to water. Install support board for span. Public safety is at risk with current condition of park. \$35,000; and
- Make bathrooms and concrete around building ADA accessible. \$18,500.

All of these expenses were City-only capital items that were incorrectly billed as a split expense due to lack of knowledge of the IA by the City staff member.

The Senior Center Interlocal Agreement was on the March 18th BOC agenda, and was delayed primarily due to concerns related to parking and the safety of crossing the street to access the facility. The motion stated to delay action until the Board’s questions are answered and to give senior citizens an opportunity to voice their concerns. At the April 1st Finance Committee meeting, City staff presented the concept of a raised, lighted crosswalk at the Church Street parking lot. On April 1st, the Board voted 6-1 to move forward with the Senior Center Interlocal Agreement, with the understanding that a raised, lighted crosswalk would be constructed. Mr. Hammett said he drove by the Senior Center on Tuesday, and noticed the raised, lighted crosswalk was still not installed. He emailed the City Manager regarding the status and the following was his response: “We will be doing some exterior improvements on Thursday. The raised crosswalk will not be one of them. The Public Works Director will not sign off on a mid-block crossing. The other cross walks will be painted. We will work with NCDOT to discuss other options at Water Street. We will do some minor street work to address the standing water at Church and the entrance into the parking lot.”

Mr. Hammett stated that an additional level of accountability should be added to the IA, which could be accomplished by amending the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (RAB) section. Converting the RAB to a Parks and Recreation Board with true authority would provide the County with additional information and oversight. The current composition of the RAB includes: One County Commissioner; One City Councilor; Two County Citizens; Two City Citizens; and One Member appointed by City & County upon recommendation of RAB. The following would be the recommended change in the composition of the new P&R Board: Two County Commissioners; Two City Councilors; One County Citizen; One City Citizen; and One Member appointed by City & County upon recommendation of P&R Board. The function and authority of the P&R Board should parallel the Solid Waste Committee, Water Committee and EMS Board. In particular, the Pasquotank-Camden EMS Board is a good example of how the P&R Board should function. Camden pays approximately 10% of the Pasquotank-Camden EMS budget and has equal representation (2 Members) on a Board that serves as a clearinghouse for all key operational issues prior to placement on a BOC agenda. In contrast, Pasquotank County pays 55% of the Parks and Recreation budget and the P&R Advisory Board has no authority.

Mr. Hammett asked the Board the following question:

- Does the Board of Commissioners support amending the number 7 of the Parks and Recreation Interlocal Agreement titled “Advisory Board” to Parks and Recreation Board, changing the composition of the Board and strengthening the function/authority of the Board: *Unanimous consensus*

4. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Ms. Henri McClees, the County’s Lobbyist provided a legislative update on the following topics:

Algal blooms – Requested \$200,000 for algal bloom research. Both Representatives Hunter and Steinburg support the request.

Solar Farm Taxes – Lobbying to change the property tax exclusion for solar energy - reduce 80% exclusion to 60%.

“Raise the Age” – The statute went into effect 90 days ago and there is no real data as to date.

Broadband – It is reported that Pasquotank County is at 100%, but that is not true. They will continue to lobby for 100% coverage in the County.

5. FIRE SERVICES:

Mr. Hammett provided the following update on fire marshal services:

From 2000 to 2010, the County contracted with Elizabeth City to provide Fire Marshal services. After 2010, the Fire Marshal function was split between Pasquotank Planning and Inspections, the Pasquotank Sheriff’s Office, Volunteer Fire Coordinator, and a contract with an Elizabeth City Firefighter, who conducted inspections on a part-time basis. At the 2019 Retreat, the Board approved the reclassification of a vacant Building Inspector position, to serve as Fire Marshal. We reclassified the position, and were able to fill the position in September with an applicant with 30 years of experience.

The Fire Marshal is responsible for, but not limited to the following duties: Fire Inspections; Fire Investigations; Plan Reviews; and Public Education – Mandated - Nursing Homes, Foster Homes, and Group Homes. There are currently over 300 businesses or business locations within the County. Just over 100 locations have been visited since the Fire Marshal was hired. Five orders to comply have been issued for violations. Over 40 door hangers have been left at closed or vacant locations. The following are the types of violations being found: Open electrical junction boxes; Improper electrical wiring; Out of service fire extinguishers; Non-permitted building construction; Improper interior finish issues in places of assembly; Non-compliant electrical applications; Improper hazardous materials storage; Sprinkler protection requirements not being met; and Improper heating equipment in flammable atmospheres.

County Fire Services are currently provided through five Volunteer Fire Departments and a contract with the City of Elizabeth City. The following are the Volunteer Fire Departments and the 2019 responses:

Inter-County	110
Nixonton	83
Newland	162
Weeksville	109
Providence	175

The County has maintained a formal contract for Provision of Fire Protection Services with Elizabeth City since Fiscal Year 1993-94. The current agreement was approved on December 13, 2017. The agreement covers Fiscal Years 2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21. If the County desires coverage after June 30, 2021, the County is required to submit notice to the City no later than December 31, 2020 to begin contract negotiations. Contract costs are: FY 2019-20 - \$434,488, and FY2020-21 - \$447,523. Under the agreement, the City provides fire protection service to all property within the Pasquotank County Central Fire District. Elizabeth City responded to 129 calls in 2019.

For the current Fiscal Year, our contract with the city was \$434,488 and the budget for all four Pasquotank departments and our contract with Intercounty combined totaled \$372,845 (\$61,643 less). During 2019, Elizabeth City responded to 129 calls in the Central Fire District and the Volunteer Fire Departments responded to 639 total calls. For FY19-20 Elizabeth City was allocated 53.8% of the County's budget for Fire Services; Elizabeth City responded to 16.8% of the calls in 2019.

Since the initial contract in FY93-94, Elizabeth City annexations have reduced the size of the Central Fire District coverage area. A large portion of the Central Fire District is farmland; there are approximately 1,300 structures combined in the Central Fire District and ETJ.

Recommendation:

- Analyze the Fire Service contract with Elizabeth City and determine an appropriate cost based on current conditions; Notify the City to begin contract negotiations prior to December 31, 2020.

Rural Volunteer Fire Departments are facing problems throughout the country. Recruitment and retention of Volunteer Firefighters is a critical challenge. Pasquotank County is facing similar problems, particularly in staffing stations during normal business hours, while many volunteers are working. Providence has requested funding for paid firefighters during the last two budget years. Call coverage for Providence has improved recently; Nixonton is the primary concern now.

Perquimans County recently passed a Resolution Encouraging Businesses to Allow Volunteer Firefighters to Respond to Emergency Calls during Working Hours. The Perquimans County Resolution addressed the shortage of Volunteer Firefighters to respond to calls during normal business hours. The resolution encourages businesses to allow members of their workforces who are Volunteer Firefighters to respond to emergency calls whenever practicable and possible for the business. Adoption of a similar Resolution by the Board could aid the County in providing coverage during normal business hours.

Many jurisdictions have implemented stipends to Volunteer Firefighters (primarily call based, but some jurisdictions include training). Some NC jurisdictions include: Chowan County - \$25 & \$25 Training; Polk County - \$15; Town of Hertford - \$10 Members & \$14 Officers; Hertford County - \$10; Washington County - \$8; Franklin County - \$5; Halifax County - \$5; and Craven County - \$3. Stipends provide a nominal fee to help defray the cost of gas/fuel, uniform cleaning, meals and other expenses to volunteers. Paying a per call stipend would help recognize the significant commitment and contribution made by the members of our Volunteer Fire Departments. A stipend could help in recruiting new volunteers and provide a higher level of responses from existing volunteers.

Recommendations:

- Implement a \$10 per call stipend, with consideration given to requiring a minimum level of training hours or a subsidy for meeting overall training requirements.

- Approve Resolution Encouraging Businesses to Allow Volunteer Firefighters to Respond to Emergency Calls During Working Hours.
- The combination of the Resolution and stipend will hopefully improve call coverage, at least for the short-term.
- A hybrid system using a blend of full-time or part-time paid firefighters may ultimately be needed at some point in the future.

Mr. Hammett asked the following questions:

- Does the BOC support conducting a Work Session on December 7th to discuss the recommended negotiation of the Fire Services contract with Elizabeth City? *Unanimous consensus.*
- Does the BOC support the resolution Encouraging Businesses to Allow Volunteer Firefighters to Respond to Emergency Calls during Working Hours? *Unanimous consensus.*
- Does the BOC support identifying funding in the Fiscal Year 2020-21 Budget to implement stipends for Volunteer Firefighters? *Unanimous consensus.*

6. NEIL EMORY – NC ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:

Mr. Emory provided sessions on:

- County Manager Performance Evaluation (provided sample evaluation form)
- Attorney Performance Evaluation (provided sample evaluation form)
- Governing as a Partisan Board

7. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

Elizabeth City/Pasquotank County Economic Development Director Christian Lockamy provided an overview of new and expanding companies in North Carolina and Virginia, as well as a discussion on the importance of Speculative Buildings in economic development.

The retreat was adjourned at 3:33 PM.

CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO THE BOARD