

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
FEBRUARY 15, 2013**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a special meeting with the City Council of Elizabeth City on Friday, February 15, 2013 in City Council Chambers in the Municipal Administration Building.

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 (*Out of Town*)

OTHERS PRESENT: Randy Keaton, County Manager
Rodney Bunch, Assistant County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Karen Jennings, Clerk to the Board

The meeting was convened at 10:25 AM. Chairman Jeff Dixon welcomed Representative Bob Steinburg, Representative Annie Mobley and Senator Bill Cook. He also introduced the members of the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners. He stated that the purpose of today's joint meeting is to provide an opportunity for the Board of Commissioners and the City Council to discuss legislative goals and issues with legislators.

1. PRESENTATION OF LEGISLATIVE GOALS:

Chairman Dixon presented a list of the top five legislative goals approved by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners on behalf of all counties in the state as follows:

- 1) Oppose shift of state transportation responsibilities to counties.
Chairman Dixon stated that this has previously been discussed by the General Assembly and if approved it would have a huge impact on the county's budget.
 - 2) Reinstate ADM and lottery funds for school construction.
Chairman Dixon said last year all of the ADM money was taken away from counties and each year the percentage of lottery proceeds that counties receive shrinks. He stated that it is important for this to be restored because it is very critical for school construction and capital needs.
 - 3) Oppose unfunded mandates and shifts of state responsibilities to counties.
Chairman Dixon stated that anytime the state shifts responsibilities for programs to counties, the counties need to ensure that the state provides some type of revenue source to help pay for them so there will not be such a large impact on the counties' budgets.
 - 4) Ensure adequate mental health funding.
 - 5) Preserve the existing local revenue base.
- Chairman Dixon stated that these goals are very broad and he would like to touch on five other key issues for this community so that when a bill goes across the legislators' desks they will know the effect it would have on our community.
- 1) U.S. Coast Guard Base.
Chairman Dixon said this is the largest employer in the county and is a very fixed entity in the community with high-paying jobs and it brings in a huge amount of economic wealth. He stated that the county would be opposed to anything that is anti-military.

2. Aviation Park.

Chairman Dixon said this is a joint venture between the city and the county. The park includes two large employers that currently employ over 200 people in high tech high-paying jobs. There is also a huge amount of land available for future businesses tied to the Aviation Park.

3) Elizabeth City State University.

Chairman Dixon stated that Elizabeth City State University is a key player in the community and also plays a part in the Aviation Park. He said it plans to construct a building to start training people in the aviation field and has also established an aviation major program.

4) College of The Albemarle.

Chairman Dixon explained that College of The Albemarle is not just based in Pasquotank County, but has a campus in Dare County and a campus in Chowan County. He said it provides vocational training and job creation. He noted that COA can modify its curriculum to help train future employees of those industries that locate here.

5) Museum of the Albemarle.

Chairman Dixon stated that each year Museum of the Albemarle is a target for budget cuts. He said although the museum is located in Pasquotank County and has the history of Pasquotank County, it also has the history of seven other surrounding counties. He noted that the birthplace of North Carolina is in Northeastern North Carolina and there is a lot of rich history here that needs to be preserved and put on display for everyone to enjoy.

Mayor Joe Peel also welcomed the legislators and introduced members of the City Council. He presented the city's list of legislative goals as follows:

- 1) The City of Elizabeth City supports legislation to allow the people to vote on an amendment to the North Carolina Constitution establishing Home Rule Authority for cities and counties.
- 2) The City of Elizabeth City supports legislation which would create regional crime labs to aid in the elimination of the backlog of evidence waiting to be processed for criminal cases. This would expedite criminal trials and allow criminals to be taken off the streets more quickly. Mayor Peel provided statistics from the Police Chief regarding the number of people on probation in the city and the number of felonies and misdemeanors pending in Pasquotank County. He explained that a great number of these cases are pending because of a backlog at the lab which is preventing them from getting evidence processed. He said some of these cases are as much as three years old. Mayor Peel stated that he knows the Department of Justice has given the states \$20 million to set up labs to process DUI cases. He encouraged the legislators to look into this to see if it could be expanded to help with the backlog. He said regional labs would be a better way to go and if that comes to pass, he would like to see one in this area to serve the northeast part of the state.
- 3) The City of Elizabeth City supports legislation which would create additional jobs for our area through projects such as the Desert Wind Project, the Middle Mile Project and the Mid-Currituck Bridge Project.
- 4) The City of Elizabeth City supports seeking legislation to modernize the tax system. However, through this process of modernization, the State needs to insure that the City is held fiscally harmless.
Mayor Peel stated that other important issues are:
- 5) The City of Elizabeth City supports legislation which defends the fiscal integrity of the Local Government Employees' Retirement System and its defined benefit structure, promotes reasonable pension reforms that are prospective in nature, and meets the needs of local employees, employers, and retirees.
- 6) The City of Elizabeth City opposes legislation that weakens or removes local control over public utility systems, specifically including water and/or sewer systems. Although this is presently a local issue in Asheville, it will have statewide implications.

- 7) The City of Elizabeth City supports seeking legislation to strengthen the law regarding municipal decision-making authority of water and sewer provisions beyond municipal limits and ensure the existing water and sewer system is given deference in order to support orderly growth.
- 8) The City of Elizabeth City supports legislation that provides all municipalities with additional local option tax revenue sources.
- 9) The City of Elizabeth City supports legislation allowing counties to have the authority to permit school districts to become their own taxing entity.

Chairman Dixon asked the legislators if they would like to address the Boards. Senator Cook stated that he is concerned with getting the unemployment rate down in North Carolina. He pointed out that in the last ten years or so North Carolina has had an unemployment rate higher than the rest of the nation by a full percentage point. He said this couples very closely with one of his other goals which is economic growth which creates jobs. He stated that he also believes that parents should be given options to get the best education for their children through the public schools, through charter schools, through home schooling, as well as trade schools and institutions of higher learning.

Representative Mobley stated that she is very sensitive to the issue regarding counties receiving responsibility for road upkeep. She said during the 2010-11 General Assembly Session when this was discussed, she was very adamant about it not happening. She said she will continue her pushback on this issue because she does not feel that counties can take on that responsibility in an adequate manner. She stated that a bill was passed in the House yesterday moving in the direction of vocational education. She said when vocational education was taken out of the high schools, it was an injustice for some of the students because not everyone is college bound. She said there are some issues she does not support such as the Medicaid expansion that was voted down in the House this week. She stated that she voted against it and will continue to push back on that idea because she does not want to see more than 500,000 individuals being without healthcare. Representative Mobley said she also does not like the idea of cutting back on unemployment because these are hard times. She explained that there is a plan on paper that will provide a regional crime lab in the west, however she will continue to push legislation to ease the backlog of cases. She stated that her concerns and interests will continue to be with the rural counties and the small towns.

Representative Steinburg thanked the city and county for hosting today's event. He reviewed the goals that have been presented today and responded to some of them. He said he also opposes the shift of transportation responsibilities to counties because he does not believe that counties are in a position to be able to take on that additional financial responsibility in the foreseeable future. He stated that he agrees that the ADM and lottery funds should be reinstated for school construction. He said this is what these funds were originally intended for, however they have now become a trough for legislators to use when they need to shore up the budget. He stated that these funds need to be going where they were intended and according to the legislation as it was originally written. Representative Steinburg said he agrees that unfunded mandates and shifts of state responsibilities to counties are not a good thing. He said all three of the legislators are sensitive to the needs of small counties. He stated that there is no question that the local revenue base needs to be preserved. Representative Steinburg noted that he had an opportunity over the last several months to look at the Mayor's Vision 2020 plan and he believes it is incredible. He said he has studied the plan in detail and believes it is a great template not just for Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County, but one that can be used in government across the state. He said he believes that Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County can lead the way for all of Eastern North Carolina. Representative Steinburg said he does not believe the North Carolina Constitution will be reformed to establish Home Rule Authority. He stated that the crime statistics presented by the Mayor ought to concern everyone and he would not want to speak on the House floor to try and get a crime lab in the east based on these numbers because he wants to see an economic renaissance. He said these crime statistics need to be improved in order to create economic development. He stated that he would encourage the city and county to take aggressive action to get crime under control. He said the Desert Wind Project is a great project and would be a win-win for the city, the county, and the entire region and he will do all he can to bring it to fruition. He stated that he fully supports the Mid-Currituck Bridge project and believes it is critical to the economic expansion of this area. Representative Steinburg said it has been pointed out that the Museum of the Albemarle was on a list to be closed a couple of years ago. He noted that the

state is having some very significant problems and must find a way to make the best use of the money it has. He said in order to be sure that the museum continues to be supported, it appears that some local funds in the amount of \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year might be required in order to help underwrite the cost of the museum.

After questions and comments from County Commissioners and City Councilors, Chairman Dixon thanked the legislators for being here today.

The meeting of the Board of Commissioners was recessed at 11:55 AM to be reconvened at 1:00 PM in the Hugh Cale Commissioners Board Room in the Pasquotank County Courthouse.

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The February 15, 2013 special meeting was reconvened at 1:05 PM in the Commissioners Board Room with the same Board Members in attendance.

2. UPDATE ON HARRELL MEDICAL TRANSPORT, INC.:

Chairman Dixon asked the County Manager and EMS Director to update the Board on the Harrell Medical Transport situation. County Manager Randy Keaton explained that Harrell Medical Transport, which is based in Gates County, was indicted last year. They are a medical transport company and primarily serve dialysis patients and those going for doctor visits who cannot go by wheelchair. He said they were indicted for Medicare fraud by billing for things they were not eligible to bill Medicare for. He stated that the case will go to trial later this year. He advised that on Friday, February 8 Medicare took away Harrell's ability to bill Medicare. On Tuesday of this week he and Assistant EMS Director Walter Meads met with Phyllis Harrell and her son who own the business. They have long-standing agreements to take patients to dialysis three times a week and they cannot be dropped because there will be no way for them to get to dialysis. Harrell also runs calls in Perquimans, Gates, and Currituck Counties, but the vast majority of their calls are in Pasquotank and Camden Counties. He said it needs to be determined how to get these patients to the doctors and dialysis centers and there are two options to consider: to grant a franchise to another company, or for the EMS Department to take over all non-emergency transports. Harrell Medical Transport has been running approximately 300 non-emergency transports per month and if a decision is made for the EMS Department to handle the transports, it will result in a large increase in volume. He asked the EMS Director to explain what has been proposed in the interim.

EMS Director Jerry Newell explained that EMS is going to have to take over the transports for Pasquotank and Camden County patients as of Monday, February 18. Anything Harrell is doing now is to make sure they get their patients to their appointments, and they are receiving no revenue for the service. He said the EMS Department needs to determine how to pick up the transports on a short-term basis and then look at the long-term. He said what they have looked at is a 60-day trial period. He stated they would need to hire six to eight of Harrell's employees on a part-time temporary basis, and use several of the EMS Department's part-timers to run an average of 10 to 12 transport calls per day. He said three crews would be needed six days a week and the county would need to lease three ambulances from Harrell Medical Transport for 60 days.

Mr. Keaton presented cost and revenue estimates for the county to handle the transports. He said for the short-term, it would be a money-maker for the county. He noted that for now however the county's primary responsibility is to take care of the patients.

Mr. Newell referred to a proposed agreement with Harrell Medical Transport, Inc. to lease three ambulances for 60 days with an option to renew after the first 60 days. He said in the meantime EMS needs to begin studying the options regarding how to handle transports in the long-term. He noted if the county decides to do the transports in the long-term, it will be necessary to purchase three van-style ambulances. He said a decision would also need to be made where to put the rigs and the additional employees. Walter Meads added that this would increase the EMS Department's call volume by 50%.

After further discussion and questions from Commissioners;

Motion was made by Gary White, seconded by Frankie Meads to approve the proposed agreement with Harrell Medical Transport, Inc. to lease three ambulances for a 60-day period with the option to renew for additional 60-day periods at a cost of \$1 per vehicle per month, and to allow staff to make the necessary arrangements for the vehicles and the employees to handle non-emergency transports for Pasquotank County patients. The motion carried 6-0.

3. APPROVAL OF AGREEMENT WITH THE HUMANE SOCIETY:

County Attorney Mike Cox provided a proposed agreement with the Humane Society of the United States for assistance with sheltering and care of dogs that were rescued during recent dog-fighting investigations. He said the total number of dogs at this time is 85. The Humane Society has agreed to provide up to \$5,000 in funding assistance for the care of the animals for 30 days. The SPCA is providing staff to take care of the dogs and is also accepting donations. Mr. Cox added that cruelty or dog-fighting charges need to be brought in order to seek a bond which would allow the county to take ownership of the dogs. He said once charges are brought it will take 10 to 15 days to get into court, so this will not be a quick process.

Motion was made by Gary White, seconded by Joe Winslow to approve the Cooperative Agreement with the Humane Society of the United States for assistance with the care of animals seized during an animal rescue operation. The motion carried 6-0

Chairman Dixon reminded everyone of the 2:30 PM work session scheduled for Monday, February 18 to discuss the Hospital RFP process as it pertains to the county's budget. At the absence of further business;

Motion was made by Gary White, seconded by Joe Winslow to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 1:50 PM.

Karen January
CLERK TO THE BOARD

Joe Winslow
CHAIRMAN