

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
MARCH 29, 2019**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a joint City-County Legislative Forum with the City Council of Elizabeth City on Friday, March 29, 2019 in the City Council Chambers.

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Frankie Meads

OTHERS PRESENT: Sparty Hammett, County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Sheri Small, Finance Officer
Brad Gardner, Solid Waste Director
Jerry Newell, EMS Director
Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board

Also present were Senator Bob Steinburg, Representative Howard Hunter, Mayor Parker, members of the City Council, Assistant City Manager, City staff, County Lobbyist, observation students, and City Clerk. Chairman Dixon and Assistant City Manager Cole provided greetings. The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM by Chairman Dixon and Mayor Parker. All attendees introduced themselves.

Representative Hunter and Senator Steinburg provided opening remarks. Representative Hunter stated that many of the items on the agenda for today are already being addressed as we speak. He is looking forward to working with Pasquotank County and Elizabeth City with any ideas we may have to bring more funds to this area.

Senator Steinburg stated that he represents 11 counties in Northeastern North Carolina. It is a large area and it is requiring every single minute of his time and more. He is happy to be here, and noted that he is honored to serve. He said there are a lot of great things happening in the region and we are heading in the right direction. He asked the elected officials to be patient because all initiatives take time. He explained that the first couple years that someone is sent to the General Assembly they are just trying to find their way around, and network and build relationships. The second term members start to receive committee appointments and chairmanships. By the time a representative is on their third term, they should be rocking and rolling. What happens so often is, an initiative is taken up, and a couple of years later that individual is gone. He said it is very important that we continue to have a working relationship, with open dialogue so we can all be on the same track, in the same engine, moving the same way. If we can do that, we are going to accomplish great things. He stated that we are really beginning to see Elizabeth City State University turn around, and he hopes that the long budget session produces a new, multi-million dollar library for the campus, which will be a great repository for the region, and will reaffirm the commitment that the state of North Carolina has to ECSU. If we lose this university or it is just holding the status quo, that's not good enough. He is here to help grow ECSU. ECSU and the Coast Guard are two of the keys for economic success in our region. He said he is here to help, and to answer questions in any way that he can.

Pasquotank County and the City of Elizabeth City jointly requested legislative support for the items 1-6 and Pasquotank County requested legislative support for items 7-10.

1. STATE CRIME LAB AT ECSU:

Chief Eddie Buffalo provided the following request:

There is an urgent need for a new State of North Carolina crime lab, one which will specifically serve the law enforcement/judicial region of District 1; to that end, the most strategic

geographical location for the proposed new crime lab is on the campus of Elizabeth City State University in Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

Due to a significant backlog of cases currently awaiting laboratory analysis for law enforcement investigations – with almost 350 of those cases from District 1 – there is an urgent need for a new crime lab. The campus of Elizabeth City State University, in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, serves as the ideal location for a number of reasons. The first reason the campus is an ideal spot is because the City of Elizabeth City is the hub of Northeastern, NC; it is the largest city east of Greenville, North Carolina. This location would best serve the law enforcement and criminal justice agencies in District 1 of the State. There are 16 local law enforcement agencies in the geographical region of District 1, with the Elizabeth City Police Department serving as the largest department of the region, with 64 sworn officer slots and 10 civilian slots. With the number of cases being submitted to the lab on a daily basis, having a crime lab locally would be an asset to all 16 local agencies, as well as State and Federal agencies. The second reason the campus is an ideal spot for the new crime lab is there is already a structure in place (the former infirmary building) that would work well. Since the campus is a part of the North Carolina University System, it is already located on state-owned property, which should presumably expedite the zoning / permitting process. Further, with the infrastructure already in place, the water and power are already established and there will not be as many requirements as with new construction, which will aide in a timeline that is conducive to the urgency in need for the crime lab to become operational. Thirdly, having a crime lab on the campus would be an asset to the curriculum already in place, in terms of potential graduates opting to be hired and stay locally in Elizabeth City upon completion of their Criminal Justice Degree and/or Science (Biology and Chemistry) Degree. Students could serve as interns at the crime lab, and many job opportunities could come from having a lab on campus, both for students as well as other residents in Elizabeth City, or surrounding areas.

In conclusion, the need is pressing and urgent to create a new State of North Carolina crime lab to serve the citizens of this state in swift prosecution of cases. District 1, located in Northeastern NC, does not currently have a crime lab and agencies that need the lab's assistance have to drive to Raleigh at the present time for the submission of evidence. By using existing infrastructure located on the campus of Elizabeth City State University, the crime lab would be in a geographical location optimal for local law enforcement agencies in northeastern North Carolina region. Our location also lends itself to being cost effective and having an expeditious timeline of completion. Housing the lab on the University campus will enhance the University's existing curriculum, as well as being an asset to all citizens of the area for overall job growth and technological advancement.

2. **ELIZABETH CITY/PASQUOTANK COUNTY AIRPORT AUTHORITY REQUEST TO USE EXISTING NCDOT AVIATION FUNDS TO CONSTRUCT AIRPLANE HANGARS, WITH ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES TO HOUSE ECSU AIRCRAFT AND ASSOCIATED FLIGHT PLANNING AND INSTRUCTION OFFICES:**

Commissioner Lloyd Griffin provided the following request:

The Elizabeth City / Pasquotank County Airport Authority is requesting your legislative support on an exciting project concerning the airport. The Authority, working closely with NCDOT Division of Aviation, is requesting existing NCDOT Aviation funds to construct airplane hangars with associated structures to house Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) aircraft and associated flight planning and instructor offices. ECSU is the only State University in North Carolina that offers a four-year Bachelor's Degree in Aviation Science. Presently, ECSU has 10 planes, which should be stored in hangars; however, since there is inadequate hangar space, these assets are being kept in the elements. The Authority has had numerous meetings with NCDOT Division of Aviation to discuss how to address the needs of the airport and the needs of ECSU through the development of airport property in support of ECSU. The Authority has entered into a contract with Parrish and Partners to perform site prep work and preliminary architectural design on the future home of ECSU hangars. To date, the Authority has already invested \$300,000 to design the related work. It has been determined by the Authority that hangar space consisting of approximately 30,000 sq. ft. is needed to support ECSU's current fleet and instruction staff. The Authority will construct and lease back to ECSU the proposed hangars at fair market value. The estimated cost of the hangars is \$4 million. The Authority is requesting your help in earmarking additional funds to the NCDOT Division of Aviation to pay for the cost of the hangars.

3. LOCAL HOMELESSNESS & FINANCING A LOCAL SHELTER:

Assistant City Manager Angela Cole presented the following request:

One of the problems facing many communities today is how to address homelessness. Due to the nature of the issue, trying to determine the extent of the problem can be difficult. It is estimated that there are 8,962 homeless individuals in North Carolina. Predominantly, the homeless population is found in urban locations such as Charlotte, Raleigh, and the Piedmont area. Information on homelessness in Pasquotank County is hard to determine. Periodically, Pasquotank County conducts a Point-in-time Count. Below is a table, which reflects the most correct information we have:

CATEGORY	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Homeless Families with Children							
Total Household	9	15	10	7	6	3	4
Number children	17	16	19	12	11	5	11
Total number persons	26	33	29	19	17	8	15
Homeless adults w/o Children							
Total Households	12	17	14	17	18	31	11
Total number persons	12	18	14	17	30	31	10
Subpopulations							
Chronically homeless	n/a	9	0	0	4	2	0
Veteran	n/a	0	1	1	5	2	1
Total Homeless People	38	51	42	36	47	39	26

Based on the most current data (2015), the number of homeless individuals in the County is 26. This number has decreased by half since its peak in 2010 of 51. Any data on the homeless is inconclusive and hard to validate. Through the Police Department, the City of Elizabeth City has identified 16 homeless individuals. The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Public Schools are reporting approximately 80 students being classified as “homeless” or “couch-surfing,” having no permanent residence (due to a myriad of home life circumstances). Of the adult homeless population, local law enforcement deduce that many of these individuals suffer from mental health issues, and some have been incarcerated on several occasions. A local daily meal program was developed to assist with feeding the homeless; however, most of the participants of the program are the working poor who have homes and are utility customers of the City. Moreover, the program only addresses one facet of homelessness – hunger.

In an effort to address homelessness, the City of Elizabeth City permitted the opening of three homeless shelters, two were women’s shelters and a third was a men’s only shelter. All were operated by non-profit charitable organizations. All have since ceased operations. The longest-operating shelter operated from the late 1990s, through the early 2000s. The most-recent operating shelter was located at 709 Herrington Road. The property is owned by the City, and the shelter was independently operated by (a now defunct) non-profit charitable organization. This shelter was limited to seven homeless individuals and a resident manager. The shelter remained full while in operation. Due to building-related issues, the City closed the shelter in August 2018.

The City Council continues to advocate for a solution assisting the local homelessness population. City staff has been instructed by the City Council to identify another location for the shelter. One or two viable location options are being investigated. Staff has not placed a dollar amount on the cost to meet the needs of a homeless shelter; however, staff estimates the cost to modify this building would be \$100,000. At a minimum, a homeless shelter will require the following:

- Kitchen
- Showers
- Laundry
- Office / Counseling Space
- Data and technology connections
- Surveillance and security monitoring systems
- On-site parking
- Sleeping accommodations
- Common area(s)

Other groups in the City, including a local community development cooperation, are attempting to help specific groups within our homeless population, namely veterans and young adults and teens. Private citizens have made limited attempts by offering rooms-for-rent or boarding houses; however, these are illegal operations, alternating from site to site throughout the City. Many of these housing options violate building codes and result in tenants living well below minimum sanitary standards.

Homelessness continues to be an issue for Elizabeth City. Individuals and families who have a safe, permanent place to live will no longer need to sleep in public or be targeted as loitering. However, while pursuing housing is the ultimate goal, decriminalizing the life-sustaining behaviors of people experiencing homelessness and recognizing their fundamental human rights are essential. Money spent on enforcement of these laws could instead be spent on developing affordable housing options or reinvesting in community services for homeless citizens.

In conclusion, there is no single strategy sufficient to completely address or end homelessness. Interventions in housing, health, and income stabilization should be holistically integrated, allowing individuals experiencing homelessness to find their unique path to recovery. Further innovations and strategic interventions beyond the currently accepted evidence-based strategies will likely be required to achieve this goal. Such innovations will require interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration, including coordinated, focused efforts from policymakers, governmental agencies, social services agencies, the health care industry, and researchers. The City of Elizabeth City is starting on this path by re-establishing a local shelter as temporary housing for our citizens experiencing homelessness.

Senator Steinburg said everybody is going to have to come together as a community, because this is a community problem that needs to be address in the community. He noted that the state is not here to solve every single issue we have. There are issues that are local issues and this is clearly one of those issues. He noted that there are grants available that might be able to help, but in his opinion the state does not have any business getting involved in this at this juncture. He said certainly if councilors are as passionate as we say they are, certainly they will find the money.

4. HARBOR TOWN PROJECT FUNDING REQUEST:

County Manager Sparty Hammett presented the following request:

The Harbor Town Project is a transformational public-private project for the Albemarle Sound Region, also known as the Inner Banks (IBX), and consists of three major initiatives in Phase One:

- Establishing a regional private water ferry transportation system on the
- Albemarle Sound;
- Themed renewal of the five major IBX historic waterfront communities; and,
- Renewal of many existing regional eco and historical tourism sites.

The major goal of this project is to transform each of these towns and the IBX region into a tourist destination, further enhanced via connection to each other by a system of water passenger ferries serving the Albemarle Sound. The marketable identity of this regional tourist attraction will be History, Arts, and Nature, all of which define the collective tourism assets of the towns. The Harbor Town Project is governed by a 20-person Advisory Board consisting of four persons from each of the initial five counties and respective towns:

- The County Manager;
- A member of the Board of County Commissioners;
- The City/Town Manager, and,
- A member of the City/Town Council.

The Advisory Board is convened by Professor Nicholas Didow and supported by his staff and other community volunteers.

An “IBX Check-in” meeting was held on February 25, 2019, which included City and Town Managers, Tourism Directors, Senator Steinburg, Representative Hunter, and Representative Goodwin. At the end of the meeting, there was a discussion on making a \$10 million special appropriation request to implement the Harbor Town Project.

A follow up meeting was conducted on March 18, 2019, which included representatives from the five counties, in addition to the five cities/towns. Two of the agenda items were proposals to conduct a Demand Analysis and Market Projection and an Operational and Implementation Plan for the Passenger Ferry Service. The group discussed the need to do request for proposals for independent/objective assessments. Another agenda item was a summary proposal for a \$10 million special appropriation to be included in the forthcoming North Carolina State Budget designated specifically to implement the Harbor Town Project. The group determined that a request for \$10 million for implementation was premature, until the appropriate studies are conducted.

The Harbor Town Project is a regional effort that includes waterfront towns in five Tier 1 counties in rural northeastern North Carolina -- Plymouth, in Washington County; Hertford, in Perquimans County; City of Elizabeth City, in Pasquotank County; Edenton, in Chowan County; and, Columbia, in Tyrrell County – in Phase One and will subsequently expand in Phase Two to include other waterfront towns and counties throughout the region. All five towns are located on rivers that run into the Albemarle Sound and are the center of the IBX region.

The tourism-based regional economic development strategy which is fundamental to the Harbor Town Project may also be replicable in other regions of the state. In this sense, the Harbor Town Project is a regional pilot project which may benefit other regions of the state consisting predominately of Tier 1 counties.

A special appropriation of \$500,000 could be used to fund: an overall Harbor Town Ferry Project Feasibility Study and Site Analysis & Readiness Assessments of each of the 5 Cities/Towns. The studies would: provide additional market research to support the viability of the project; provide a detailed analysis of operating costs; and determine the exact facility/infrastructure needs. The data compiled from these studies could serve as a basis to make a fact based request to the legislature for future implementation funding and identify specific needs for each of the five waterfront towns.

5. LOCAL EFFECTS OF FIREFIGHTER AND EMS SEPARATION ALLOWANCE LEGISLATION:

Assistant City Manager Angela Cole presented the following request:

During this current session of the General Assembly, legislators will be asked to consider the Parity for First Responders legislation – House Bill 278, and its companion bill in the Senate, Senate Bill 179. The legislation would grant a separation allowance to firefighters and emergency medical services personnel who retire with 30 years of service. If they retire at age 60, they would only need 25 years of service, according to the proposed legislation. Currently, that benefit is available only to law enforcement (police and fire) retirees. The text of the legislation also states that the earliest firefighters or EMS personnel could collect the benefit would be July 1, 2024.

According to the Professional Fire Fighters and Paramedics Association of North Carolina (PFFPA), the benefit would vary based on the salary someone retires with, but would be around \$1,000 a month per retiree. The allowance would be in addition to the state pension firefighters and EMS personnel already receive.

There is no debating the sacrifice and commitment first responders make for our community and its citizens. However, like many other local governments across the State, the City of Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County oppose the separation allowance legislation. Simply put, we cannot afford to absorb our share of the estimated \$300 million cost created by the allowance benefit. As the bills stand right now, the legislation will provide no funding to cover the cost. The NC Department of Commerce designates Pasquotank County as a Tier 1 County. The classification indicates that the economic distresses affecting our community are numerous, and rightfully so. Additionally, municipalities are being required to put more money into the Local Government Employees' Retirement System, adding another 1.2% of payroll a year through 2022 into the system, a cost of more than \$76 million a year. The City of Elizabeth City will spend at least \$166,000 in the Fiscal Year 2019-2020 Budget in order to satisfy the retirement system shortfall. Overall, City personnel costs are anticipated to increase anywhere from \$600,000 to \$800,000 in the next fiscal year. The increase is due to payroll, retirement system contributions, and rising insurance costs. Forcing smaller cities in North Carolina to pay an extra supplement to retirees

would likely cause a retraction of another credit/benefit the employee is receiving, including 401K employer contribution or even merit compensation.

The City presently has seven retired firefighters who are eligible for the separation pay. The separation allowance for these seven retirees has not been calculated; however, if using the PFFPA model, the allowance benefit could add \$84,000 to the City's already increasing personnel cost. By comparison, the City have 10 retired police who receive about \$119,000 a year in separation pay. The City does not employ EMS personnel. City officials counter the argument that fire fighters and EMS personnel have physically taxing jobs, by calling to attention that there are just as many if not more other local government employees that have physically demanding jobs that would not covered by the benefit.

Supporters of the allowance benefit also argue that local government needs to make the additional investment in professional firefighters because staffing volunteer departments is becoming increasingly difficult. The City of Elizabeth City has not taken a backseat to this hiring challenge. For the past 15 years, the City has maintained an assertive training and certification program for our fire personnel. The City invests over \$150,000 annually for training, continuing education, and job-related certifications. Similarly, both the City and the County work with our local high schools and colleges, identifying and pre-certifying entry-level firefighters. The City has expanded its recruitment of professional firefighters via job fairs, online social media and testimonial videos.

In keeping, another argument for the bill is that departments can replace aging firefighters who have high salaries, injury rates and insurance rates with younger firefighters; that is simply not true. Across the nation, hiring and retaining firefighters (as well as law enforcement officers) is at a crippling low. Recently, the Elizabeth City Fire and Police Departments had to restructure their pay scale in order to increase starting pay in hopes to attract and retain new hires. Over just the past year, the Elizabeth City Fire Department has lost five of its 43 employees (11%) to nearby departments that pay more. Situated in economically depressed northeastern N.C., small departments like ours cannot compete with neighboring cities in Virginia whose starting pay is at least \$7,000 more per year. So the 'high salaries' that older firefighters earn are not far from what upcoming firefighters will be earning. Funding a higher rate of pay for entry-level firefighters, coupled with the cost of the proposed separation bill, small municipalities would suffer, and so would taxpayers.

The fire service traditionally put the welfare of others over that of our own for the safety of everyone else. This is the case of supporting such a bill. For the sake of preserving a reasonable retirement system that currently benefits everyone involved, the Elizabeth City Fire Chief recommends we do not support such a bill at this time. City and County officials argue that if the General Assembly determines the additional allowance benefit is a priority, it should help pay for it, rather than issuing another unfunded mandate. Without a funding source, the legislation might force economically distressed communities like Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County to cut other important fire service expenditures.

Commissioner Barry Overman said obviously this initiative is important to him, as he served 30 years as a firefighter, 26 as an EMT, and 22 as a sworn law enforcement officer. He explained that he is retired, so he has no personal agenda. He said this legislation is very important for the wellbeing of firefighters and EMS personnel. There is a good reason why federal firefighters are required to retire at age 55. Wearing turnout gear and fire packs, and working in extreme and life-threatening environments for 30 years, takes a toll, not only on the physical condition, but the mental condition of fire and EMS workers. It used to be the backs and knees of firefighters that failed, now firefighters and EMS workers are responding to victims of suicide and homicide. They are wearing bulletproof vests to drug overdoses and other crimes, and the mental toll has become a huge issue, not to mention the rise in cancer. He said the numbers that are being thrown around are grossly incorrect.

Commissioner Overman asked council to consider what a 30-year career responding to emergencies does to the human body, and to give the same ability to firefighters and EMS workers that has been given to law enforcement workers since 1987, which is to retire with some quality of life. He said personnel are an organizations' most important asset, not just when they are here, but when they are gone. He said, "Do the right thing and at least educate yourself on the options and the advantages".

6. SHIPYARD ACQUISITION AND RESTORATION:

Deborah Malenfant, Executive Director of Elizabeth City Downtown, presented the following request:

The Elizabeth City Shipyard located at 722 Riverside Avenue was once a boon to the Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County local economy. Formed in 1914 by a merger of two other shipyards, it served visiting yachts and local commercial boats, including oil tankers. During World War II, the shipyard manufactured wooden 111-foot SC Class submarine chasers for the United States Navy, setting wartime records for building the most sub chasers for the Navy in the fastest time. The shipyard also manufactured YT-class yard tugboats and QS-class quick supply boats. It operated as Elizabeth City Iron Works and Supply Company as a repair yard until the mid-1960s. It currently operates as Riverside Boat Works, a shipyard/marina facility. You can still moor a boat there and boat repairs are still being completed there.

The site consists of a 3.2 acre, irregularly shaped parcel of land. It is bound by Riverside Avenue to the south, the Pasquotank River to the north, residential properties to the east, and City-owned/Community College-owned properties to the west. The property is zoned in the City's Central Business District.

The site, although currently operational, is greatly underutilized; it is considered visually displeasing from all directions, and it detrimentally detracts from our prime valuable asset, our waterfront. It hampers economic development and tourism in our downtown area, which affects our entire city.

Environmental concerns and issues have been a hindrance to attracting private investment in and development of the site. In July of 2015, a Phase I Environmental Assessment was prepared for the site. In August of 2016, a Phase II Site Assessment was conducted. The Environment Assessment found contamination from petroleum hydrocarbons gasoline and diesel range organics, and volatile organic compounds, semi-volatile organic compounds, and heavy metals.

The estimated cost for remediation of the property for public use is at least \$1,000,000. This estimate was provided in 2016 and is exclusive of any groundwater remediation costs. Remediation for public/private use or private development would likely be more significant. To date, we have found that no developer is willing to even consider the property due to the environmental concerns and cleanup costs.

The City of Elizabeth City has discussed purchasing the shipyard property in the past. The first time, in 2016, the offer to purchase the property was withdrawn after the results of the environmental assessment determined the extent of the property's contamination with heavy metals and other hazardous materials. In 2018, the City again began discussing the possibility of purchasing the property and has been working with other local agencies/entities and state agencies on a plan of action for doing so.

More recently, several factors have come into play that provide hope that this property can be acquired and improved for the benefit of our community. Those factors include:

- Pasquotank County being designated as a partner County in the Governor's Hometown Strong initiative, whereby our local governments can partner with state agencies and resources to meet our local priorities, one being the cleanup and revitalization of the Elizabeth City Shipyard property.
- Having the Elizabeth City Shipyard project included as a specific economic development project in Governor Cooper's Strengthening Rural Communities portion of his recommended budget, which budgets \$134.7 million to strengthen rural communities across the state.
- The census tract within which the property is located being designated as one of our County's two certified Opportunity Zones designed to attract investment capital into low-income areas of NC.
- The possibility of brownfield restoration and assistance through the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality's Brownfield program for remediation.
- The opportunity to apply for PARTF and CAMA grants to combine and leverage potential resources for the greatest impact.

- The project being designated a key local priority by City Council and inclusion in the City's recently developed Waterfront Master Plan as well as the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County Parks & Recreation Master Plan.
- The Elizabeth City-Pasquotank County's ongoing acquisition, improvements and programming of surrounding properties to the immediate west (Coast Guard Park and Charles Creek Park) for public use and enjoyment.
- Increased desire and advocacy from our community to improve the property.

The acquisition, cleanup and restoration/revitalization of the Elizabeth City Shipyard property is a primary targeted renewal zone for Elizabeth City. It has the potential for preservation and adaptive reuse to a mixed-use focus on open space and recreational activation, along with adaptive reuse of existing sheds and other upland and in-water infrastructure. Potential private development opportunities for the areas surrounding the shipyard property increase with the improvements to this property. The City of Elizabeth City requests that you support Governor Cooper's Strengthening Rural Communities initiative and its \$1,000,000 earmark for the Elizabeth City Shipyard project.

7. REDUCING SOLAR FARM TAX INITIATIVE:

County Manager Hammett presented the following request:

North Carolina is number two in solar power generation capacity, behind only California. A driving force in North Carolina's development of solar energy has been the property tax break for solar energy electricity generation. A statute, NCGS 105-275(45), passed in 2008 excludes from property taxation 80% of the value of solar energy electric systems, which it defines as "all equipment used directly and exclusively for the conversion of solar energy to electricity." North Carolina General Statutes designate as a special class of property all equipment used directly and exclusively for the conversion of solar energy to electricity.

This legislation contributed to North Carolina becoming home to the second-highest amount of solar installations in the nation by 2015. California is home to many of the largest solar farms in the world. Most of the large scale solar farms are located in the desert, where the use of the land for solar is the "highest and best use." The northeastern corner of North Carolina has recently seen a number of large-scale solar farm developments, and other potential developments are being discussed. In contrast to California, the large-scale solar farms are being located on property with much higher economic potential than solar.

Pasquotank County was targeted for a 3,000 acre solar farm along Bypass 17 that would have taken 60% of our industrial zoned land. If an ordinance amendment had not passed which established a ½ mile (2,640 feet) setback from the Highway 17/Future I-87 corridor, land that is vital to the County's economic future would have been taken. The land adjacent to interstate highways that is zoned industrial or highway commercial or at least designated that way in a future land use plan is always a very valuable asset for communities. The 80% tax break is a key factor in creating an economic distortion, where it is possible for solar companies to profit from land that may be extremely valuable to Northeastern NC counties in the future.

There has been previous legislative movement to address the 80% tax break for solar energy systems. House Bill 171, which aimed to cut the solar energy tax break from 80% to 60%, was filed in February 2017. Senate Bill 781 filed in May 2018, would have more aggressively cut the exclusion for systems used for nonresidential use, reducing it by 20% each year until phasing it out entirely. We request your support in reducing the solar tax break from 80% to 60%.

8. PROPOSED DEGREE REQUIREMENT FOR PARAMEDICS:

EMS Director Jerry Newell presented the following request:

The North Carolina Office of Emergency Medical Services (NCOEMS) is proceeding with the public comment phase of rule changes to North Carolina Administrative Code. One of these changes with 10A NCAC 13P .0502 changes the criteria in order to become a Paramedic. The proposed rule change, specifically found under .0502 (a) (2) (A and B) requires that effective July 1, 2023, an Associate Degree be obtained before the issuance of a Paramedic credential can be made. Also referenced are the alternative plans for those who achieve Paramedic credentialing, but do not get an Associate Degree within an allotted time frame.

Although the County understands the direction of the NCOEMS when attempting to “raise the bar” for emergency medicine at the Paramedic level, we believe that requiring an Associate Degree can, and will, harm the functionality of our EMS agencies in Northeastern North Carolina in the following ways:

- Affecting the small, rural EMS agencies in their ability to recruit and retain Paramedics;
- Limiting the number of Paramedic students in an already struggling industry;
- Squeezing out those who may not be able to obtain an Associate Degree due to time and/or finances, but would make superb Paramedics; (Some of the Pasquotank-Camden EMS best Paramedics have come “out-of-the-fields” and into an ambulance quite successfully.)
- Forcing Tier 1 County Governments, such as those east of I-95, to substantially raise salaries for EMT-Paramedics, creating budgetary pitfalls for smaller rural county governments; and
- County governments could be forced to reduce the level of service in their counties in order to keep emergency medicine affordable.

Pasquotank County completely agrees that we want our paramedics trained and well-educated; however, we feel that imposing the new Associate Degree requirement would further limit our applicant pool, when we already struggle to recruit and retain Paramedic providers. The NCOEMS has established a series of meetings across the state in order for the Rules Task Force to hear verbal, as well as written comments. The County will provide verbal and written comments against the imposition of the degree requirement. We request your assistance in opposing this rule change, which will negatively impact all Northeastern North Carolina County EMS departments.

9. JUDICIAL DISTRICT I FACILITY COST SHARING:

County Manager Hammett presented the following request:

The North Carolina First Judicial District Court is one of fifty district courts in North Carolina. It has jurisdiction in the Counties of Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Pasquotank, and Perquimans. Pasquotank County’s Public Safety Building and County Courthouse now house District Attorney and Public Defender personnel for every county in Judicial District 1, except for Dare County. Dare County provides its own office space for District Attorney and Public Defender staff.

State law makes counties responsible for providing space for court officials who handle cases originating in their counties. Pasquotank is only legally required to provide space for staff in the District Attorney and Public Defender offices who handle cases in Pasquotank County. Pasquotank has asked the other District 1 counties to help pay for its facility costs. For the past six years, only Camden and Perquimans counties have contributed for the use of Pasquotank’s facilities. Chowan, Currituck, and Gates have refused to share the cost for District Attorney and Public Defender space – their last year of payment was Fiscal Year 2012-13.

The cost allocation has not changed since Fiscal Year 2013-14, when the Public Defender received additional space. The total annual amount due for the three counties is \$59,146 (Chowan - \$17,278; Currituck - \$27,573; and Gates - \$14,295). Over the six-year period, Pasquotank has lost \$354,876 in funding due to the counties failure to pay their share of Judicial District 1 facility costs.

10. STATE ALLOCATION OF TIRE DISPOSAL FEES:

Brad Gardner, Solid Waste Director, presented the following request:

The North Carolina Legislature changed the appropriation to the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR) for the 2013-2015 biennium for the scrap tire disposal program. The change was enacted through G.S. 130A-309.6, an amendment to the Portion of Scrap tire Disposal Tax credited to general fund and Repeal Scrap Tire Disposal Account Section 14.16.(A) G.S. 105-187.19(B). This action reallocated Tire Disposal Fee revenue, including the transferal of 30% of the net proceeds. The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) is now underfunded for the continued support of cost overrun grant funds for individual counties to manage scrap tire disposal, as only 70% of the tire disposal fees collected are distributed to the counties on a per capita basis.

Since 1991, Pasquotank County has followed NC General Statute 130A in keeping scrap tires out of all municipal solid waste (MSW) landfills. Scrap tires continue to be banned nationally from MSW Landfills to date for impairing landfill operations. Pasquotank has followed the law for over 28 years, and annually depends on cost overrun grants to help support and maintain our scrap tire recycling program.

- In the last two fiscal years, Pasquotank County has collected over 2,277 tons of tires for a total expense of \$227,776, and we were reimbursed \$89,000 in scrap tire cost overrun grant funds, which is equivalent to 39% of our costs.
- Since Fiscal Years 2017-18 and 2018-19, the scrap tire cost overrun grant funds have begun to finally “sunset” or be completely drawn down.
- NCDEQ currently has \$420,000 annually to distribute among 100 NC counties for cost overrun grants. This has led to grant requests only being funded at 30% by NCDEQ for Fiscal Year 2018-19. This trend continues in reducing funding and creating a financial strain on county resources.
- NCDEQ states that tire management rules should be strengthened more at the local county level. We continue to require scrap hauler certificates on all loads, in-person visits to tire dealers, physical counting of tires delivered to our facility, and in-person explanation of scrap tire disposal rules.
- For counties such as Pasquotank, we are similar to a hub and spoke model of collecting more scrap tires from surrounding rural counties due to the commercial businesses being physically located here; we are collecting scrap tires from a much larger population area than just Pasquotank County. This leads to cost overruns when the quarterly distributions do not meet our tonnage needing disposal.

The County agrees that we will do everything we can to protect our scrap tire program and follow all rules pertaining to the proper disposal of scrap tires. We are considering raising our fees for tires in Fiscal Year 2019-20. However, the more we charge for tire disposal, the more likely individuals will not follow proper tire disposal, possibly leading to illegal stockpiles or abandonment in surrounding rural fields, swamps, roadsides and/or woods. We would appreciate an increase in the tire disposal funding above the current 70% allocation through a reduction of the diversion of funds to other state government functions.

Senator Steinburg thanked everyone for attending and for their input. He said we need to have more of these kinds of gatherings where he can hear concerns from the Boards and he can share ideas about what is going on in Raleigh as it relates to those concerns, as well as the probability and likelihood of those concerns moving forward. He said he is currently working on a bipartisan bill with Senator Don Davis that will allow students at early colleges who are at a higher academic performing level to go to schools like ECSU. They would start in their junior year and bring with them the possibility of raising the average score at the university, which will improve the university’s standings. He added that the bill would allow the students, should they choose certain schools within the system, to go for free for the last two years. He said East Carolina University built Greenville, NC. We have our own university here. We need to all pull together and make this university be the absolute best university.

Representative Hunter stated that their doors are always open for anything we may need.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:09 PM.

CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO THE BOARD