

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA  
APRIL 24, 2013**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners and the Pasquotank County Governance Committee met today in a joint meeting on Wednesday, April 24, 2013 at Weeksville Lions Club in Weeksville.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Lloyd E. Griffin, III

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Rodney Bunch, Asst. County Manager  
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney  
Julie Stamper, GIS Coordinator  
Lynn Scott, Asst. Clerk to the Board

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM by Chairman Jeff Dixon. Commissioner Perry gave the invocation and Commissioner Sterritt led in the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Dixon welcomed everyone present and asked Commissioner Bill Sterritt, Chairman of the Governance Committee to preside over the meeting.

Commissioner Sterritt welcomed everyone present and thanked the members of the Weeksville Lions Club for allowing us to use their facility. He introduced staff, Commissioners, Community Relations Commission members, and NAACP President, Keith Rivers.

**1. PRESENTATION ON POTENTIAL RESTRUCTURING OF VOTING DISTRICTS:**

Commissioner Sterritt introduced County Attorney Mike Cox and GIS Coordinator Julie Stamper. Attorney Cox explained that every ten years during the census the Board and the County are required to look at redistricting. He noted that this is not what we are doing currently. He said we are actually talking about restructuring the Board to allow more minority representation on the Board. He explained that in 1965 the Board of Commissioners changed from seven members to five members. Two were from Elizabeth City, two were from outside the City and one was At-large. He said at that time Pasquotank County was one of two counties that had a seven member board. He stated that the City and the County were sued in 1984 by the NAACP for alleged violations of Section 2 and Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. He explained that Section 2 prohibits all forms of racial discrimination in the election process across the US and Section 5 applies to certain governments that had low voter registration rates at the time the Voting Rights Act was adopted. He said the Supreme Court is currently hearing a case to determine whether Section 5 is still valid and needed. He said Pasquotank County is one of forty counties covered by Section 5 in North Carolina, which means all election changes, however minor, must be pre-cleared by the United States Department of Justice. In 1985, the Board of Commissioners agreed to the current structure of the Board. In addition, the General Assembly approved a Local Act approving the restructuring. Pursuant to the Consent Order and the Local Act the Board of Commissioners went from five to seven members and four year terms. In addition, four districts were created and three At-large seats. Pursuant to the Consent Order one district would have to have at least 55% minority voting age population. Any change we make will have to go back to the Federal Courts.

Attorney Cox stated that after the 1990 census there was not enough deviation to require redistricting. In 2001 and 2011, there was enough deviation to require redistricting. He noted that we kept the same four districts and three At-large seats, but we had to move the district boundary lines a little bit to comply with the "one person, one vote". He said there are three ways to restructure the Board of Commissioners. One is to meet the statutory requirements and have a public referendum. The second way is by a Local Act of the General Assembly. The third way is by a Local Act by the General Assembly and a Public Referendum.

Attorney Cox stated that Pasquotank County has litigated this issue in the past, which makes things a little bit unique. He said we still have a Consent Order that is in place in the Federal Courts with the NAACP that was signed in the mid 80's. He said it would need to be modified with the approval of the NAACP and the Federal Court. He noted that it would certainly make things easier if we have something in place that the NAACP agrees with and the Federal Courts will sign off on. He said any changes in the structure of the Board will have to be pre-cleared by the Justice Department.

Mrs. Stamper stated that in her job as GIS Director she was involved in both the 2000 and the 2010 censuses. She said in 2000, Pasquotank County had a population of 34,897, with 40.05% black and 43.05% non-white (Asians, Latinos, etc.). In the 2010 census, the population was 40,661, with 37.76% black and 43.29% non-white. She said the population is not becoming any whiter or any blacker, but is becoming more "mixed" race. Up until the 2000 census a voter had to say they were black, white, Asian, etc., but in the 2010 census you could say that you were up to fifty three different combinations. She said when we went from 34,000 to 40,000 we had to redistrict and make the populations roughly equal in the four districts. Previous times that this was performed there were about the same number of people in the City as there were outside the City, but when the population changed to 40,000 there were 21,000 outside the City and 19,000 inside the City. So, we were no longer able to use our standard boundaries of the City.

Mrs. Stamper noted that when we are redistricting or restructuring there are traditional redistricting principles that are used, which include compactness, continuity, respect for political subdivisions, respect for communities of interest, and protection of incumbents. She said the Department of Justice does not want to see districts that stretch from one end of the County to the other. The districts must all be connected. She said we try to keep communities together that share common interests and we try to make sure that incumbents are not pitted against each other. She went on to say that we do not want to put our minority population in a worse situation than they were before the election.

Mrs. Stamper explained that the current structure of the Board includes four districts; Northern Outside, Northern Inside, Southern Inside, and Southern Outside. She said one commissioner is elected from each district and three commissioners are elected At-large. She said the population of the county is approximately 40,000, so we have to make sure that our four districts are roughly the same size, +/- 10%. She said there are roughly 10,000 people in each district. She stated that the Southern Inside district is our minority district with 66.53% black. She said up until the 2010 census the populations inside the City and outside the City were roughly the same, but in the last ten years the County grew much quicker than the City. Therefore, when she drew the line she had to pick up some people outside of the city to make the districts roughly the same population.

Mrs. Stamper explained that when the information from the census is reported back to the County it is done in census blocks. She said the information that is given is very general and no specific information is given. She stated that when she puts a census block in a voting district she has to take everyone in it. She said she cannot just take the black people or just the white people. She noted that the census is performed every ten years. She said we can assume that people have moved into the County in the last two or three years, but we do not know that and the only time that we get an official count that we can use for redistricting/population purposes is when the censuses come out.

Mrs. Stamper stated that one of the plans that the County is looking at is the 2-2-2-1 Plan. This plan would redistrict the County into three districts; the Central, the Northern, and the Southern. Two commissioners would be elected from each of the districts on alternating years and one commissioner would be elected At-large. In this system, each district would represent about 13,000 people. The Central District would have a 54.24% black population, the Northern District would have a 28.2% black population, and the Southern District would have a 29.0% black population. She noted that the largest percentage she can achieve in the Central District is 54%, because if she starts bringing in other census blocks the number will go down. Mr. Rivers asked if 54% is the largest percentage she can make the minority district. Mrs. Stamper answered yes, with this plan. Dr. Houston asked wouldn't that go against the retrogressions of lowering the percentages that exist currently. Attorney Cox said he is not sure that it would be retrogressive. He said it does deviate from the 55% on the consent order, but he is not sure that it makes it more difficult for a minority to select the candidate of their choice. Mrs. Rivers said she thought retrogression means leaving the minority community in a worse position. Mrs. Stamper

said it could be argued that this puts them in a better position. Mrs. Rivers noted that before the percentage was at 64% and this would put it down to 55%. Mrs. Stamper stated that minorities would have the opportunity to elect two minorities as opposed to one. Attorney Cox noted that there will be different opinions on this. Dr. Houston asked if the Central District is basically the City. Mrs. Stamper answered yes. He noted that more than 50% of the residents in the City are renters and not homeowners, but in the County there is a much larger percentage of people who are homeowners. He asked if that would make the City population more fluid. He said that is why he questioned if this would be retrogressing.

## **2. PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Mr. Andy Revie of 508 Small Drive stated that he was not born and raised in Pasquotank County. He said he and his wife moved here seven years ago because they are comfortable in the community. He said he is a genealogist and he always asks people where are you from and in Pasquotank County one of the things that he has noticed is people are either born, raised and stay here or they are born and raised, go away for a career and come back to retire here. He noted that is one of the things he and his wife liked when they came here. He stated that they are members of the local church and volunteer for the food bank. He said the members of the church and their clients all know each other. As an outsider who is here by choice, he has observed that the community is tight knit and people know each other and it is a good thing. He said he does not quite understand what the problem is. He asked does anyone in the county feel they are being disenfranchised by the redistricting. He said his observation is that everybody in the county is represented fairly no matter how the county is redistricted. It seems to him that everybody is pulling together. He stated that he is here by choice and he is glad that he is.

Dr. Johnny Houston of 602 W. Main Street Extended stated that he owns his own home. He said he too was not born here but came here by choice from a large city. He said when he first came here he had a lot of aggravation. He said everything was too slow but eventually we acclimated him and now he does not want to go back to a large city. He said this is a tight knit community, but he would also like to see it well represented in certain perspectives. One of the things we do not like to talk about in America is racism because it unnerves a lot of people. He said we like to think that everything is great and race does not make a difference, but it has been the greatest divide in America since it got started. He stated that whites came here by choice and blacks were forced to come here under another set of conditions. Getting equality has been a difficult choice to deal with. When it comes to representation, it boils down to where you can sit on a board to influence and sit in a position and how much money you have to put out to get to that position. He said he was astounded at how much money was spent on the last national election. He said is it absurd and it makes good people not want to be bothered with public service and these positions. He stated that he is looking for a time when you can get good people who want to serve and can put themselves out for public service and can do a good job and do not have to worry about spending so much money and twisting so many people's arms like the people in Washington, D.C. do to get these positions. There is a need to look at some kind of equity and how well we can do this and he thinks when the population is very close to 50% and we have only one black on the commission of seven something needs to be done to change that. He said there are two plans out here and he would like for the commissioners and the community to study them and come up with a solution that we can move forward with. He stated that in Pasquotank County a black person does not have to speak only for a black person or a white person for a white person, but we need enough blacks and whites on different boards and positions so that they can talk to one another and make sure certain interests are dealt with when we are making decisions.

Mr. Frank Jennings of 83 Small Drive asked Miss Mary Sharpe to join him in the front of the room. He said he does not know what we are talking about "black and white". He said he has lived beside Mrs. Sharpe and her brothers for many years. He stated that they played together and when he went to her house her mother had little switches and she would wrap the switch around his leg if he needed it. When she came to his grandmother's house his grandmother treated her just the same. He said personally he would like to see it go back to where every township is represented. He noted that Miss Sharpe does not have a representative in her township and he has three in his township. He went on to say that Newland and Salem do not have representatives.

Miss Mary Sharpe of 1239 Salem Church Road said what Mr. Jennings said was true. She grew up in a good neighborhood of good neighbors all her life and she has learned how to deal with people. She often said she did not know anything about segregation because she grew up in an

integrated neighborhood. She said she was blessed, but bringing equality to all and being on equal basis is important and we should have good representation in all areas. She said she agrees with Mr. Perry that we need others to represent them in other areas. She said Mr. Perry has done excellent but at the same time we need the thinking of others on the board in case something comes up. She believes in equality. How we get there she does not know but she does know that we have to come together and work together and do it the best we can. She said it is not I, it is not you, it is we as a group that should be on an equal basis. She said time is not as long as it used to be and we have got to learn how to work with one another, black, green, blue or grey. We must come together and get it done and do it God's way.

Mr. Kentwood Turner of 1317 Little River Drive asked the Board members present if they are volunteer members and if they are serving the county without being on the clock. Commissioner Sterritt stated that this meeting is not about quizzing the Board, it is about the public's opinion about what we are trying to propose. Mr. Turner stated that it involves tax dollars. He said during Mr. Meads' campaign he reported that the County is \$74,000,000 in debt. He asked if we are thinking about that every day. He said we can make committees to meet every night, but that is not saving money. He noted that we have hospital issues. He stated that Mr. Jennings and his friend talked about the racial problems and his problem is not race, but qualifications. He wants a man that can do the job. He said it bothers him when no one can answer his question of whether they are getting paid or not. He asked if it is an unfair question. Commissioner Sterritt said it is not an unfair question but this is not the forum to quiz the Board and say are you doing this or are you doing that. This is not about taxes or how much money we owe. All of those are valid questions and are public, but this forum is about the possibility to redistrict. He said the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners and the Board's Governance Committee are seeking input from interested citizens on a proposal to implement a voting plan to allow for more equal demographic representation on the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners. Mr. Turner asked if anyone has challenged the current system to say that it is unfair, unjust, or undemocratic. He asked if the 2-2-2-1 Plan does not work and we do not get enough blacks on the commission what is Plan C or are we going to qualifications of a man, can he do the job, is he qualified, will he give us the right representation. He said racism is supposed to be faded out now and no discrimination, but it comes right back. He asked again if anyone has challenged the Board. Commissioner Sterritt answered once again this is not about quizzing the Board it is about the public's opinion on whether we should move forward or backwards. Mr. Turner said his opinion is it is easier to set back and draw a paycheck and tell other people what to do. He stated that if the commissioners believed in what they are doing then it would be different if they were volunteering their time, but he has a feeling the cash register is right in the middle of it and it is his tax dollars. That's his problem with these meetings all over the county.

Mr. Johnnie Walton of 401 New York Avenue said he feels there is a race problem. If Mr. Perry got up and moved and the panel remaining had to judge him for him, he would feel better if Mr. Perry was sitting there, because it looks a little more equal. He stated that Dr. Houston brought up a good point that the people who live in Elizabeth City move out of Elizabeth City from time to time. The kids on the ECSU campus come and go and it may take the student 4.5 years to graduate so they could vote in two elections. He noted that ECSU students are always investigated, but COA and MACU are not. He said there was no need to get a big lawyer to try to help the case, because it did not change the election. The person making the challenges was made a hero and all they did was distort the truth. He said we need people to represent us that have our interests in mind. He stated that it is not the older people, but the younger people that are getting ramrodded, because they do not have anybody fighting for them. He said we need another person on the Board looking like the majority of Elizabeth City.

Mr. Michael Brooks of 119 Carver Street stated that he was very attentive to what Dr. Houston said. He told Mr. Turner that race still matters. He said he graduated from Mid Atlantic Christian University and he was raised up in a segregated neighborhood. Not saying that someone from a different cultural upbringing could not represent him, but their world view is totally different from his. He said he has been in an interracial marriage for thirty one years and he said racism definitely exists. He said someone that was not brought up in the segregated neighborhood that he was and dealt with his world views and economic situation cannot easily address the issues that are important to his wellbeing. He noted that the population as it relates to racial groups is not well represented on the Board. He said the City Council shows a better representation of the people as a whole. He stated that one thing we cannot do is act like race does not exist because it does. Just because Barack Obama is President we do not live in a post-race society. Everyone is not racist because of the color of their skin. He said if someone from

England was raised in his neighborhood they could represent him because they would know his world view. Unfortunately, it is not like that. He thinks restructuring is something that needs to be addressed, not later, but now. He said we are smarter than this and he does not believe that anyone on the Board believes that the world view of everyone is well represented on the current Board. It hurts him when the kids from ECSU are attacked for voting and no other universities or colleges are bothered. He said something is wrong with that picture.

Mr. Keith Rivers of 104 Grandview Drive thanked the Governance Committee. He stated that a year and a half ago when the NAACP came before the Board to propose a restructuring he thinks it was something very new because nothing like that had been proposed in quite a few years since the NAACP did so under the leadership of Harold Barnes and Attorney Penny who litigated the lawsuit. He said the local lawsuit was the basis for all the lawsuits across the state. He thinks there is a reoccurring theme here. He noted that the more things change, the more they remain the same. We have made personal changes prior to the 1965 signing of the Voting Rights Act. He said integration took place. He did not go to a segregated school. Year after year students at ECSU are attacked. He stated that there is an African American in the White House, but at the same time we are introducing new Jim Crow laws called "photo id". He said the City was sued in 1985 because they did not comply with the Voting Rights Act. After the City was sued and the lawsuit was won, the County created the current system that we have today, which created the one minority/majority district. When talking with the persons that were involved in that meeting, they thought that this system would create a balanced system of representation. It does not mean that whites cannot represent blacks or blacks represent whites, but it has been twenty nine years and the only African American that has been elected to the Board of County Commissioners is from the minority/majority district. There still need to be districts of influence. He said the law states that it gives minorities the ability to elect candidates of their choice. For example, if we go back a few years in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward of the City, which is a majority/minority district they elected a white council person to represent them. Twenty nine years later the Board looks the same and whether we want to accept it or not the voting in Pasquotank County is racially polarized, which means when color goes into the polls color votes for color. In other areas such as Charlotte, Congressman Watts has been voted in year after year and his district was only 40% minority prior to redistricting. He said they are progressive and more modern day. The entire part of northeastern North Carolina is no different than we are. Tyrrell County is 66% minority and they have one black on the board. He stated that county commissioners run and don't even come into minority neighborhoods and ask for their support because they don't have to. He said which plan we are going to use we will have to work out, but he believes even if we use the 2-2-2-1 Plan the numbers can be increased to around 64%. He said he knows the Board will do the right thing.

Commissioner White left the meeting. (7:20pm)

Mr. David Boone of 901 Cedar Point Circle said he remembers watching television one night and the then current chairman of the FCC Benjamin Huffs entertained a question from a young white man. The young white man asked, you mean to tell me if I come and ask you for a job you are going to tell me that you do not have one even though you had one and gave it to someone else. Mr. Huffs answered yes. Mr. Boone said you all have been doing that to us for years. The next morning he said he got his checkbook out and wrote a check for \$500 and sent it and became a life member of the NAACP. He said he knew he was going to retire here. He said all he wanted to do was join, but the next thing he knew he was president. He said the Justice Department called him late one evening and told him that he needed to get his minutes together because they were getting ready to make certain that Pasquotank County is doing exactly what they are supposed to do. He said he was scared. Twenty nine years later we are sitting around looking at this thing. He stated that when he goes to meetings in other parts of the state and country the people look like a rainbow. He said he went to Kentucky for vacation and his wife told him that she has never seen so many people out in the streets all day, all weekend. He said it is very important to get to know each other. It is also important that we move forward to make our Board look more representative of what Pasquotank County is. He said the City has done a wonderful job.

Mr. Dennis Herring of 596 Pitts Chapel Road stated that he personally knows most of the commissioners on the Board. He said a couple of years ago he ran for the school board and he met Mr. Winslow and he actually campaigned against him. Now, he said he is probably one of his better friends because he got to know him. One of the problems he sees that we have by not having certain amounts of minority representation is that there are people who are afraid to come

up to some of the commissioners because they do not feel comfortable. He said he has been asked himself by others to talk to the commissioners because they were not accustomed to dealing with people the way he is. He said that is his reasoning for believing that we certainly need some more minority representation on the Board. He said he personally does not have a problem with any of the gentlemen on the Board, but he thinks it would be beneficial for the County if we have more minority representation.

Dr. Kurt Hunsberger of 900 W. Church Street stated that he is here tonight as a member of the Community Relations Commission, which was put together by the City and County several years ago. He said he was not on the commission at that time, but as he understands it the City and County people both thought that there was some potential racial conflict in our community and they felt that the formation of the commission would be helpful and hopefully it has been. He said he does not have anything new to say except that he thinks Dr. Houston described the situation as he sees it. As several have said, many of us have personal contact with each other from different races and that is very important, but in terms of representing the community a politician needs to be able to understand the people he represents and their world views. He stated that his wife had a book club at his house the other night and a woman said she met with a group of people who live in this community and they have a community within Pasquotank County and they are perfectly fine and they love and take care of each other. He said he did not even know that they existed. He said this was not a particular racial group but a community within the community, but it is true that we can live in our own little spot and not understand at all what is going on in another spot a half a mile away. There are people in other parts of our community that are having other issues than he is having and they need to have a way to have that verbalized in the political arena and that is what this is about. He said he certainly supports it and the CRC supports moving forward with making it happen.

Mrs. Betty Parker of 1503 Gosnold Avenue stated that she is a native of Elizabeth City and has lived in the Weeksville area for 64 years. She grew up here and went to segregated schools and taught in a desegregated school. She said she knows what it means to be with different ethnic groups. She stated that her parents taught her to love everyone. She said most of the things said tonight were extrinsic and very informative, but she wants to give an intrinsic/sensitive view. She said let's reverse the board that we have here now and replace it with all blacks and one white and have the majority of the citizens as white. She said we would think there was something wrong with that picture. She said we need to be fair. She stated that there have always been black people that are qualified, but they are simply not elected because of how we live in this area. Blacks live mostly with blacks and whites are predominant and have resources and money. She noted that her parents had to leave Elizabeth City and go to Washington, DC to work in order to send their children through college because they wanted to make sure that they went to college and they did not have to stay in the fields and work. She said she became a high school mathematics teacher and taught for 33 years and she is still teaching. She said "we may be Po, but we are not stupid". She stated that this restructuring is necessary and she is glad that it is being pushed and driven. She added that we have to drive it so that we will all benefit. She does not want anybody going away saying that we are just doing this because they want blacks and they are not qualified. She said yes they are, we have many people that are qualified but have not had the chance, but now we do and they are going to be one of the best councils, just like in 1984.

Mrs. Freda Smith of 1509 Emerald Like Circle, #103 stated that she is not a native, but is here by choice. She said she has been here for a little more than three years. She stated that she loves this area and she would like to see a lot more done and changes made. She said with the judicial system we have a right to be judged by a jury of your peers and she sees the same thing here. We should have that same representation because of where we are and who we are. There are many qualified people, but people need to get out and take responsibility also to go to the polls and vote. She said she has no problems with the people that are on the Board, but it would be nice to look over and see someone who looks like her. She said all of us are obviously engaged and involved and concerned about what is happening and what could happen. She stated that this place should be packed and we need to figure out a way in Elizabeth City to get more people out and support those who run. She said she is sure there are many people who are qualified and we need to get behind them and vote. She noted that she will be as active as possible to help the city grow.

Commissioner Winslow stated that he honestly does not know if they are getting paid tonight, but that is not what is important to him. He said he came here tonight to find out what the people

of this community think and let them voice their concerns. He asked that the people from the Weeksville Community raise their hand. There were eight in attendance. He said we can go to the city and hear what they think or go to Newland and hear what they think, but we are here tonight to hear what Weeksville thinks. He said race is an issue. He has lived here all his life and this is a unique community. Many people moved here for a reason. This is a wonderful area. He stated that Miss Sharpe is one of the most wonderful people he has ever met and his life would not be complete without meeting her. He said he has enjoyed meeting Mr. Herring and he is a wonderful man. He stated that he carried papers at ECSU when he was eight or nine years old and he was treated with respect and in those days there was segregation. Now, so many years have passed, but he still believes we are the same people and we respect each other and there is a lot of love between the races in this particular area. He said he does not know how it is in Alabama or New York because he has never lived there and does not want to. He said he does know some people who have moved down here from New York because they like the area and that is important. Whatever it takes to get through this, with mutual respect is what he wants.

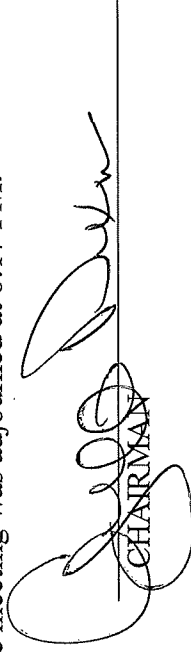
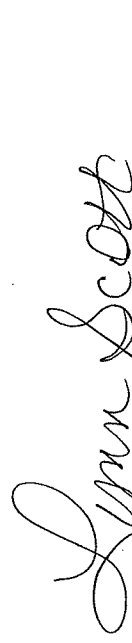
Miss Andrea Williams of 1308 Halstead Boulevard stated that she is a native of Elizabeth City and has been here all her life. She said she has friends from all walks of life. She stated that diversity is very much needed here. She noted that this is a small community and most of us here know each other. She added that no one tonight has talked about women. When she looks at the panel in front of her, there are no women and that is an issue as well. She said she is very interested in seeing the variety of plans we have. She noted that we have a lot of needs in our city. There are a lot of vacant buildings and we need jobs. We need to pull together and have diversity on all our boards and commissions.

Commissioner Perry stated that he is the cause of all of this. He said he has been here a very long time and he is very appreciative of our staff for allowing him to continue this discussion. He said if we continue to vote by race, in 1,000 years we may still only have one black commissioner out of seven. He stated that he is blessed to know 90% of the people in this community because he has been here for 76 years. He noted that he has taught many of the people here tonight. He said this is not all about race, but it is about improving our community. He said he can talk to anyone and he feels that they will accept it, because he is honest in what he says, but his replacement more than likely would be intimidated because he would not have had the exposure that he has had with people. He is not bothered because he has worked in the public and crawled in the potato fields. He said his grandson had a birthday party about two weeks ago in Tennessee and the room was filled with many different races, but he does not feel that we have the types of relationships in our community that will allow us to understand one another. He said changes are needed and our young people need to see us doing things together. It is important that we learn how to live together because this community belongs to all of us and not just one small group of us.

Motion was made by Commissioner Perry, seconded by Commissioner Winslow to adjourn the Governance Committee meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.

Chairman Dixon asked for a motion to adjourn the commissioners' meeting.

Motion was made by Cecil Perry, seconded by Commissioner Sterritt to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 PM.

ASSISTANT CLERK TO THE BOARD