

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING May 15, 2006

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: Larry G. Yoder, Chairman
 W. Darrell Robertson, Vice-Chairman
 Wesley E. Bolick
 William L. Hammer
 W. Norris Keever

STAFF: Rick French, County Manager
 Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

MEDIA: Micah Henry, The Taylorsville Times

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, May 15, 2006 in the Catawba Valley Community College / Alexander Center Multipurpose Room, Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Yoder called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Parker French, student at Alexander Central High School and son of County Manager Rick French, gave the invocation and Davin Ivosic, student at Ellendale Elementary School, led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Chairman Yoder requested a Resolution Supporting State Assumption of County Share of Medicaid be added as Agenda Item #4A.

Commissioner Keever made a motion to adopt the agenda as amended. Commissioner Robertson seconded the motion.

Commissioner Hammer requested appointments to the Town Planning Board of Adjustments listed under Agenda Item #5 (Board Appointments & Reappointments) be tabled until the next Commissioners' Meeting. He requested this as a friendly amendment.

Commissioner Keever made a motion to accept Commissioner Hammer's friendly amendment. Commissioner Keever seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Hammer made a motion to adopt the agenda as further amended. Commissioner Keever seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

PUBLIC HEARING: 2006-2007 ALEXANDER COUNTY PROPOSED BUDGET

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the proposed 2006-2007 budget and presented the following information:

- The 2006-2007 proposed budget for the General Fund is \$28,522,273. The proposed budget is .3% of 1% less than the current budget, which totals \$28,614,643.
- There are no proposed rate increases. The ad valorem tax rate will remain 51 cents. Only 12 counties out of 100 have lower tax rates. The average tax rate for 2005-2006 was almost 66 cents. The highest tax rate in the state is \$1.10 (Scotland County) and the lowest tax rate is 25 cents (Dare County).
- The County's effective tax rate for 2005-2006 is a little over 46 cents. The state average effective tax rate is just over 58 cents. The John Locke Foundation rates Alexander County with the lowest amount in taxes and fees to local governments in the state.
- Last year, counties across the state budgeted \$459,842,175 for Medicaid. This year Medicaid costs are projected at \$487,876,331 or a 6.1% increase over last year. Medicaid will cost Alexander County taxpayers \$1,920,740 – a 116% increase since 2000. Approximately 17.2% of Alexander County residents are Medicaid eligible and 9 cents of the tax rate pays the county's mandated share of Medicaid. Therefore, 7.1% of the current budget is required for Medicaid.
- North Carolina is the only state requiring county participation in all Medicaid services. The state requires counties to pay 15% of the non-federal share of all Medicaid service costs. The General Assembly sets the county share annually in the state budget bill. Governor Easley's proposed budget has no relief for counties, even with a \$2.4 billion surplus.
- The following is a listing of some budget highlights:
 - \$90,000 for courthouse security

- \$108,000 for new Sheriff's Department vehicles
 - \$80,000 for Bethlehem Branch Library start-up
 - \$230,000 for health insurance and worker's compensation increases
 - \$120,000 for Health Department increase
 - \$75,000 for auditorium debt payment
 - \$40,000 for debt service payment increase
 - \$17,800 for part of Comprehensive Development Plan update
 - \$23,000 for new Animal Control vehicle
 - \$4.9 million for schools
- Several new employees are included in the budget:
 - Health Department – one dentist and 3 staff paid with health funds.
 - DSS – one Child Protective Social Worker II and a clerical position paid with DSS funds.
 - Courthouse security – one full-time, 2 part-time, and one contracted position.
 - Library – 2 part-time employees for Bethlehem Branch.
 - Senior Center – one part-time employee.
 - Existing Industry & Utility Development Director – one full-time employee paid 50% with water revenues.
 - There is a Communications Supervisor position in contingency. Due to a tight budget, this position will be held and reviewed in 6 months.
 - A 2 ½ COLA for County employees has not yet been budgeted; however, this is a high priority. Several state bills currently being considered by the General Assembly could result in a budget amendment which would add the COLA in the budget.
 - The County is currently participating in a facility energy improvement plan with the school system that could save an estimated 15% or more of the county energy costs.

Chairman Yoder called the public hearing to order and requested any public comment.

Public Comment / Board Response

Chip Swinnie, Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, requested that the Board consider increasing the proposed appropriation to the Chamber of Commerce to the same amount as the current year or to match the Town of Taylorsville's appropriation for 2006-2007. He explained that increased funding would enable the Chamber to support local businesses and better promote tourism. He mentioned a tourism brochure that would be distributed later in the year as well as a new website.

Chairman Yoder pointed out that the County intended to provide financial assistance to the Chamber for several projects throughout the year.

Hayden Bentley, Sheriff, requested that the communications supervisor position be taken out of contingency and funded in the 2006-2007 budget. He reviewed the application,

interview, and hiring process that took place and pointed out that an applicant had been selected to fill the position; however, he inquired as to why the Board had decided to put a hold on the position for 6 months.

Commissioner Keever replied that the budget was extremely tight. He also stated that the Board felt a person with more computer skills was needed to fill the position. Commissioner Keever asked if the Communications Committee unanimously voted to proceed with the hiring of the chosen applicant. Mr. Bentley responded that the majority of the committee voted to proceed and not re-advertise the position.

Chairman Yoder and Commissioner Robertson suggested this item be discussed in Closed Session because it dealt with a personnel matter and a specific individual. Mr. Bentley agreed to join the Board in Closed Session later in the evening.

Mr. Bentley also requested the jail supervisor position be funded. He explained that, due to the shortage of bailiffs, the jail was sometimes left unattended while bailiffs picked up meals from the prison or escorted someone upstairs for court. He felt this was creating a liability for the county.

Commissioner Robertson pointed out that the Board added 2 jailer positions in the current budget and an additional patrol officer. Commissioner Bolick mentioned that the Board was providing \$90,000 for courthouse security in the 2005-2006 budget and he pointed out that the Board was considering a budget adjustment later in the meeting to appropriate \$150,000 for Sheriff's Department salaries and wages. Mr. Bentley replied that there had not been enough funding to cover all salaries and wages along with vacation and benefits in the original budget which resulted in the need for more funding.

The Board members stated that they would review these requests for consideration in the budget ordinance scheduled for adoption on June 5, 2006.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Bolick made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Hammer seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

PUBLIC HEARING: PROJECT ORDINANCE FOR ALEXANDER RELOAD RAIL PROJECT & CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT

David Icenhour, Economic Development Director, informed the Board that the Alexander Reload Rail Project consisted of the construction of approximately 1,200 feet of rail line in the Alexander Industrial Park that would connect to the main line of the Alexander Railroad. He stated that Alexander Reload Associates would be investing approximately \$1.3 million in site improvements and would create approximately 10 new jobs with expected operation to begin in August of this year.

Mr. Icenhour stated that the cost of the rail project totaled \$133,413.68. He pointed out that Alexander County received a grant from the N.C. Department of Transportation in the amount of \$80,500 and he noted that the remaining funds would be provided by the Alexander Railroad Company resulting in no county funds being used for the project. Mr. Icenhour informed the Board that a bid opening was held on Monday, May 1, 2006 where 3 bids were received. He stated that the low bid of \$123,213.68 was submitted by Keith Benfield Contractor, Inc. for the construction of the rail line. The low bidder for the alternate was G.L. Wilson Building Company with a bid of \$10,200.

Mr. Icenhour presented Project Ordinance #61 for Alexander Reload Associates Rail Project. He requested the Board approve the Project Ordinance and award the construction contracts to the low bidders as previously mentioned.

Chairman Yoder called the public hearing to order and requested any public comment. There being no public comment, Commissioner Kever made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Robertson seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Kever made a motion to approve Project Ordinance #61, to award the construction contract to Keith Benfield Contractor, Inc. in the amount of \$123,213.68, and to award the construction contract to G.L. Wilson Building Company in the amount of \$10,200. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no one present to speak during the Public Comment Period.

PROCLAMATION FOR ASTHMA AWARENESS MONTH

Sylvia Turnmire, Director of Planning & Development, stated that the Environmental Protection Agency had designated the month of May as Asthma Awareness Month. In an effort to promote wellness and increase awareness of asthma and its related triggers, Ms. Turnmire requested the Board adopt a Proclamation in Support of Asthma Awareness Month in Alexander County declaring May 2006 as Asthma Awareness Month.

Ms. Turnmire explained that exposure to dust mites, secondhand smoke, mold, and pet dander as well as exposure to high levels of ozone could significantly trigger an asthma attack and decrease lung efficiency. She mentioned that there were 470 reported cases of children with asthma in the Alexander County School system and probably many more that were unreported. Ms. Turnmire stated that staff had been working with the school system, daycares, and the media in raising asthma awareness. She also pointed out that informational materials would be distributed at the Annual County Wellness Day to be held on Wednesday, May 17, 2006.

Commissioner Robertson made a motion to approve the Proclamation in Support of Asthma Awareness Month in Alexander County. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Bolick felt the Board should adopt this proclamation on an annual basis for each May to be recognized as Asthma Awareness Month.

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING STATE ASSUMPTION OF MEDICAID

Rick French, County Manager, discussed the increasing costs of Medicaid to North Carolina counties and he mentioned that Wednesday, May 17, 2006 was Legislative Action Day. He explained that the NCACC was urging all counties to approve a Resolution Supporting State Assumption of County Share of Medicaid to be sent to all local General Assembly representatives in hopes of sending the message that counties desperately need Medicaid relief.

Mr. French mentioned that the General Assembly planned to cap Medicaid costs this year; however, counties are now hearing that the cap may not happen, even though the state has a \$2.4 billion surplus.

Commissioner Robertson made a motion to approve the Resolution Supporting State Assumption of County Share of Medicaid. Commissioner Hammer seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

Commissioner Hammer presented the following appointments and reappointments to County boards and committees:

A. HICKORY METRO HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER BOARD

Appoint Norris Keever

B. PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Reappoint L.E. Herman 2 years

C. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (WPCOG)

Reappoint Karen Hoyle 2 years
Reappoint Dane Whitworth

Commissioner Hammer made a motion to approve the appointments and reappointments as presented. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT #60 - #62

Rick French, County Manager, discussed the purpose of Budget Amendments #60 - #62, which included the following information:

Budget Amendment #60 – To increase the budget for the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources “Gates Staying Connected Grant” award. To amend the budget for receipt of Emergency Management Performance Grant funds that were omitted from the original 2005-2006 budget.

Budget Amendment #61 – Grant project ordinance for Alexander Reload Rail Project previously approved.

Budget Amendment #62 – To increase the budget for salaries and wages line items for several County departments.

Commissioner Keever made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #60 - #62. Commissioner Robertson seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

OTHER BUSINESS

Rick French, County Manager, discussed the following issues during Other Business:

- A. Commissioner Keever, Commissioner Hammer, and Mr. French will be attending the County Assembly Day in Raleigh on Wednesday, May 17, 2006. A NCACC Joint Meeting will also be held in Raleigh on Thursday, May 18, 2006.
- B. An open house has been scheduled for the Employment Security Commission featuring Job Link Services for May 24, 2006 from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. The ceremony will begin at 3:30 PM.
- C. Don Harrington, Harrington Construction, has begun renovation of the former Employment Security Commission to house the Elections Office.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve the County Manager’s Report. Commissioner Keever seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Minutes from the April 24, 2006 Regular Commissioners' Meeting.
- B. Tax Release Requests for April \$4,672.92 and Tax Refund Requests for April \$3,072.40.

Commissioner Keever made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Robertson seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 4, 5, & 6) TO PREVENT DISCLOSURE OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CONTRACTUAL, & PERSONNEL

Commissioner Robertson made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:12 PM to prevent the disclosure of confidential information and to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 4, 5, & 6). Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Hammer made a motion to adjourn at 8:45 PM. Commissioner Robertson seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Larry G. Yoder, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board