

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING February 26, 2007

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: W. Darrell Robertson, Chairman
 Wes Bolick, Vice-Chairman
 William L. Hammer
 Harold M. Odom

ABSENT: Larry G. Yoder

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

MEDIA: Lee Sharpe, The Taylorsville Times

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, February 26, 2007 in the Catawba Valley Community College / Alexander Center Multipurpose Room, Taylorsville, North Carolina. A quorum was present.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Odom gave the invocation and also led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Chairman Robertson reported that Representative Ray Warren had introduced a bill at the request of the Board for authorization to enact a one-cent sales tax.

Chairman Robertson also mentioned that Commissioner Yoder would not be attending the meeting tonight because he had the flu.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Commissioner Hammer made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

STATE OF THE COUNTY MESSAGE

Chairman Robertson gave the following State of the County Message:

I appreciate the opportunity to continue the tradition of presenting the State of the County Message to the citizens of Alexander County. The State of the County is good. This is mainly due to many dedicated volunteers and a hard working and professional County staff along with the outstanding leadership and involvement from my fellow County Commissioners.

We are proud of the relationship we have with the Alexander County Board of Education. The Alexander County school system continues to be focused on every student achieving at the highest level. The “No Child Left Behind” federal legislation, which required schools to make Adequate Yearly Progress, was very successful in our school system as 8 of our 10 schools made Adequate Yearly Progress.

The school system has many caring teachers and others who are working very hard to support learning. Alexander County Schools rank as one of the top systems in the state in several areas dealing with teachers, which is one of the keys to a great school system.

- Our school system was one of 3 systems in the state to have 100% of our teachers Highly Qualified, as defined by the “No Child Left Behind” legislation.
- Our school system ranked 25th out of 115 systems with a teacher turnover rate of 9.05%. The state average is 12.58%.
- Our school system is 10th in the state in the percent of National Board Certified Teachers.

Alexander County Schools was ranked first in the Unifour in all 3 of these categories.

Also, Alexander Central High School had 10 Teaching Fellows last year, which was first in the state of North Carolina.

The auditorium has been a very successful partnership between Alexander County Schools and Alexander County Government. The auditorium has hosted 202 events with over 56,000 people attending in the first 14 months of operation.

We are very proud of our school system and feel it is very helpful to our Economic Development Program to have a strong educational system.

The highlights of the Alexander County Economic Development Program for 2006 are as follows:

- **Unemployment Rate:** In 2006, the monthly average was 4.8% down from 5.5% in 2005. The unemployment rate is the 46th lowest of the 100 counties.
- **Existing Industry Position:** In July, Jason Williams was named to the new position of Existing Industry Specialist and Utility Development Director. He has visited 37 of 45 manufacturing facilities since that time.
- **Industry Recognition Program:** On a regular basis, we ask a representative from one of our existing industries to come to a County Commission Meeting to make a short presentation concerning their company. In 2006, executives from 6 different companies made presentations to the board.
- **Hiddenite Industrial Water, Sewer Project:** This \$2.1 million project will provide sewer service to Craftmaster Furniture, Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, and Paladin Industries. The project includes the installation of approximately 26,000 linear feet of wastewater lines and 2,500 feet of water lines and will create **100 new jobs.**
- **Furniture Training Grant:** This joint project with Catawba Valley Community College will establish a Furniture Training Program in Alexander County. With assistance from the Economic Development Department, CVCC is applying for approximately \$215,000 from Duke Energy.
- **Funds Obtained for Local Industries:** In 2006, **\$1.4 million** was obtained for local industries, an increase over the \$835,372 obtained for local industries in 2005.
- **Industrial Announcements:** Industrial Timber from Cornelius came to Alexander County bringing 42 jobs and Liberty Reload located in the Alexander Industrial Park bringing 6 jobs and also greatly enhancing the entrance to the Industrial Park.
- **Certified Site:** On October 15, 2006, we received a letter from the N.C. Department of Commerce indicating that the Industrial Park had achieved the designation of "Certified Site."
- **New Website for Economic Development:** In 2006, the Alexander County Economic Development Department launched its first independent website. The website, AlexanderEDC.org, provides a more professional look for our Internet presence as well as expanded information about Alexander County.

Catawba Valley Community College is increasing its instructional presence in Alexander County. A new Alexander Advisory Board was created to identify needs and assist the

college in providing adequate programming for the citizens of the county. The college will work closely with Alexander County Schools to meet the educational needs of the citizens. The college has just completed a new "Information Highway" room for the purpose of expanding curriculum offerings at the Alexander Center. The college will also intensify marketing of available programs in order to maximize access and opportunity for Alexander County.

A number of capital projects were completed in 2006. The upgrade of the Alexander County Enhanced-911 system has been completed and is currently being utilized by County dispatch personnel. This new computer driven system will monitor 911 calls and emergency responses and includes a mapping program for incoming calls. The final part of this system was completed through the purchase of a new voice recorder and E-911 switch.

The old Foothills Area Mental Health facility was renovated and repaired with mental health funds. Mental health services are now contracted. New County offices have been relocated into the facility including the N.C. Cooperative Extension and the Alexander Soil and Water Conservation District.

A 1,000 square foot dental office is now open in the Health Department. The dental office was constructed with a state grant of \$150,000. A new Bethlehem Branch of the Alexander County Library System is now open. This 2,500 square foot facility is located in the Mark North building (beside the Bethlehem Post Office) in Bethlehem. The Board of Elections is now located in the former Employment Security Commission building. This facility was renovated and expanded to accommodate One-Stop Voting. An additional 730 square feet was added to the existing 1,600 square foot facility located on First Avenue in Taylorsville.

The Alexander County Commissioners have been and will continue meeting with the Jail Task Force. After an extensive interview process, Hemphill-Randell has been selected as the jail project architect. A jail feasibility study is currently underway. It is anticipated that jail construction will start in the spring of 2008 and take approximately 18 months.

The commissioners joined the fight against the Concord and Kannapolis Inter-Basin Transfer during 2006. Alexander County joined Catawba, Caldwell, McDowell, and Burke Counties along with the cities of Hickory, Conover, Morganton, Valdese, Lenoir and others pledging financial resources to file a lawsuit to keep the water transfer from occurring.

The new Alexander County Prescription Drug Discount Program began in 2006. Using the card will save county citizens from 13% - 35% on pharmacy prescriptions and up to 50% on mail order drugs. The discount card, which is intended for individuals who do not have insurance coverage, is free and can be picked up at the Health Department, Social Services Department, and Senior Center. This program saved residents over \$30,000 in 2006.

Alexander County residents planning on sprucing up the yard this spring now have a new option for disposing of mounds of leaves, grass, and tree limbs. The landfill began operation of a yard waste facility in October 2006.

Alexander County Government's website was recently recognized as one of the top five government websites in the nation for counties with a population of 10,001 to 50,000 by the National Policy Research Council. Alexander County was the only government entity in North Carolina to receive the award.

Alexander County was once again rated by the John Locke Foundation as having the lowest tax burden in North Carolina in 2006. The fund balance of our General Fund decreased slightly in the past year to 10.9%. The decrease is due to a change in the mathematical formula used by the Local Government Commission to calculate the fund balance percentage, but the County is still working toward the goal of a 12% fund balance. The County has not incurred any new debt since the fall of 2005, but there are 3 projects on the horizon that will require the issuance of debt in the next couple of years. First, the County expects to borrow \$3.5 million through a low-interest state loan for the Vashti area water project. The second project is the Aquatics Center which is expected to cost approximately \$3 million. The third project is the construction of a jail facility at an estimated cost of at least \$8 million.

The closing of the Alexander County Hospital Emergency Room in late 2006 rates as a low point in emergency services. EMS calls are being monitored daily, while a number of interested parties continue to discuss different options for the facility. Alexander County and the Town of Taylorsville are currently discussing arrangements with the N.C. Division of Facility Services.

Alexander County will continue to feel growing pains in 2007. I want to thank my fellow County Commissioners and staff. We look forward to the challenges ahead. May God bless you.

HIDDENITE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EXPANSION & RENOVATION PROJECT

Jack Hoke, Alexander County Schools Superintendent, presented a model of the proposed expansion and renovations to Hiddenite Elementary School. He explained that in 1999, MGT of America completed a facilities study for the school system that included recommendations to move the 9th grade to ACHS, add classrooms at each middle school as well as Stony Point and Sugar Loaf Elementary Schools, construct a new Ellendale Elementary School, and construct an auditorium, all of which had been completed.

Mr. Hoke pointed out that the last project included in that study was to expand the cafeteria at Hiddenite Elementary School; therefore, he recommended Pinnacle Architecture to design and oversee the construction of the expansion and renovations at Hiddenite Elementary School to include expanding the cafeteria 2,162 square feet and adding 2 serving lines as well as adding 11 classrooms, 3 offices, a teacher workroom, and restrooms for a total estimated cost of \$2,210,000

to be paid with a combination of capital outlay funds. Mr. Hoke stated that the expansion and renovations would also provide better security for the school.

Mr. Hoke mentioned that staff hoped to open bids in May and begin construction on the cafeteria during the summer to be ready for the 2007-2008 school year. He also projected that the entire project would be completed by July 2008.

Commissioner Hammer made a motion to accept the recommendation to employ Pinnacle Architecture to design and oversee the construction of the expansion and renovations at Hiddenite Elementary School as explained at an estimated cost of \$2,210,000. Commissioner Odom seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

EXISTING INDUSTRY RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Jason Williams, Existing Industry Specialist, introduced Dr. Librado (Lee) Gonzales, Vice-President of Manufacturing for Royale Comfort Seating. He informed the Board that Royale Comfort Seating had been in operation since 1988 and was the 11th largest industrial employer in Alexander County.

Dr. Gonzales discussed the types of products fabricated by Royale Comfort Seating including cushions, pillows, and, most recently, bedding products and he noted that 129 employees were on staff. He stated that Royale Comfort Seating operated first shift from 7:00 AM to 4:30 PM and a mini-shift from 4:30 PM to 8:30 PM and he pointed out that staff was looking to expand the mini-shift into a full second shift during the coming year. Dr. Gonzales also noted the company was looking to expand in the future and was working towards international opportunities to remain competitive.

The Board thanked Dr. Gonzales for attending and providing an update.

REIMBURSEMENT RESOLUTION FOR THE AQUATICS FACILITY PROJECT

Rick French, County Manager, presented a resolution, as provided under federal tax law, to facilitate the County's using proceeds of tax-exempt financing to restore the County's funds when it makes capital expenditures prior to closing on the financing for the Aquatics Center. Mr. French explained that approving the resolution would allow the County to be reimbursed for any costs incurred for the project before the installation of a financing contract.

Commissioner Odom made a motion to approve the resolution as described. Commissioner Hammer seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

REIMBURSEMENT RESOLUTION FOR THE VASHTI (NORTHEASTERN) AREA WATERLINE PROJECT

Rick French, County Manager, presented a resolution, as provided under federal tax law, to facilitate the County's using proceeds of tax-exempt financing to restore the County's funds when it makes capital expenditures prior to closing on the financing for the water project. Mr. French explained that approving the resolution would allow the County to be reimbursed for any costs incurred for the project before the receipt of a N.C. Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve the resolution as described. Commissioner Hammer seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

HIDDENITE INDUSTRIAL PROJECT (CRAFTMASTER FURNITURE, MITCHELL GOLD + BOB WILLIAMS, PALADIN INDUSTRIES)

David Icenhour, Economic Development Director, informed the Board that proposals for engineering services for the Hiddenite Industrial Water & Sewer CDBG Project were received on Friday, February 9, 2007. He stated that 6 proposals were received from McGill Associates, The Wooten Company, Pease Associates, Hazen & Sawyer PC, West Consultants, and Hayes, Seay, Mattern, & Mattern.

Mr. Icenhour stated that he and Rick French, County Manager, had reviewed the proposals and was recommending that the contract for engineering for the Hiddenite Industrial Water & Sewer CDBG Project be awarded to Hayes, Seay, Mattern, & Mattern based on professional personnel, experience, availability, and thorough knowledge of the specific area and project.

Commissioner Hammer made a motion to award the contract for engineering for the Hiddenite Industrial Water & Sewer CDBG Project to Hayes, Seay, Mattern, & Mattern as recommended. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

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

A. EQUALIZATION & REVIEW BOARD

Appoint Ron Roseman 1 year

B. JUVENILE CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

Appoint Holly Yongue to serve as Karen Hoyle's designee (term expires 1/08)

Appoint Angelia Bowman to serve as Leeanne Whisnant's designee (term expires 1/08)

Appoint Commissioner Odom to replace Commissioner Hammer

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

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #35 & #36

Rick French, County Manager, discussed the purpose of Budget Amendments #35 and #36, which included the following information:

Budget Amendment #35 – To budget for architect fees for the Aquatics Center Project to be paid during the 2007 fiscal year. To increase the Resource Center budget for an additional allocation of Criminal Justice Partnership Program grant funds. To increase the EMS budget for receipt of a grant from Wal-Mart. To increase the Bethlehem Library budget for receipt of donations.

Budget Amendment #36 – To budget for the Hiddenite Industrial Water & Sewer CDBG Project local matching funds to be paid during the 2007 fiscal year.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #35 and #36. Commissioner Hammer 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. The new floor at the Animal Shelter has been completed. Staff will begin accepting new animals beginning tomorrow, February 27, 2007.
- B. The annual NACo Legislative Conference is scheduled for March 3-7, 2007 in Washington, D.C. Commissioners Odom, Bolick, and Hammer along with Mr. French plan to attend.
- C. The annual Commissioner's Choice Award Banquet is planned for Tuesday, March 20, 2007.
- D. An N.C. Association of County Commissioners Taxation and Finance Committee Meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 28, 2006 in Raleigh.
- E. Mr. French distributed some proposed changes to the Animal Control Ordinance relating to the Cruelty to Animals Section and with feral (wild) cats. He stated that these changes were originally submitted to the Board at the January 22, 2007 and noted that they complied with the Animal Welfare Act.

Commissioner Odom made a motion to approve the proposed changes to the Animal Control Ordinance. Commissioner Hammer seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Minutes from the February 12, 2007 Regular Commissioners' Meeting and Work Session.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Hammer 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

Chairman Robertson made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 6:55 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 Hammer seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Odom made a motion to adjourn at 7:50 PM. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

W. Darrell Robertson, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board