

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING June 2, 2008

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: Larry G. Yoder, Chairman
 Wes Bolick
 Harold M. Odom
 W. Darrell Robertson

ABSENT: William L. Hammer, Vice-Chairman

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, June 2, 2008 in the ~~Catawba Valley Community College / Alexander Center Multipurpose Room,~~ Taylorsville, North Carolina. A quorum was present.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Robertson gave the invocation and Annie Cothren, student at Wittenburg Elementary School, led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Chairman Yoder congratulated all Alexander Central High School seniors who would be graduating this Saturday, June 7, 2008 at the Cougar Stadium. He wished each of them success in the future.

Chairman Yoder also recognized Matt Payne from NC State University, Dustin Harrington from East Carolina University, and Kelly McClain from UNC Charlotte who recently participated in the NCAA Baseball Tournament.

Boy Scouts Troop #347 from Ellendale was present at the meeting to earn their Citizenship in the Community badge. Chairman Yoder presented each member with a County pin.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Chairman Yoder requested Agenda Items #2 and #3 be switched to allow Rod Watts from EnergyUnited to attend another commitment.

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

PUBLIC HEARING: 2008-2009 ALEXANDER COUNTY PROPOSED BUDGET

Rick French, County Manager, provided the following information for the 2008-2009 Alexander County proposed budget:

The 2008-2009 proposed budget for the Alexander County General Fund is \$31,992,302 or 2% less than the 2007-2008 budget which totaled \$32,697,760. This is a decrease of \$705,458.

There is no tax rate increase recommended so the rate will remain at 53.5 cents. There is only 1.5% growth in tax revenue in the budget or \$213,000.

The new quarter-cent sales tax that was approved in January and became effective on April 1, 2008 will generate an estimated \$500,000 in the 2008-2009 budget. The new sales tax was approved for the law enforcement and detention center project. These funds are budgeted to pay Architect Jack Hemphill who will design the jail during the 2008-2009 fiscal year. There are no funds budgeted for construction.

Six full-time employees were requested in the budget in areas of Safety, Sheriff, Information Technology, Tax, Public Buildings, and DSS; however, only three positions are being recommended. Positions in the Sheriff's Department and Information Technology are recommended in response to workload. One inspector position will be eliminated due to the number of inspections being down 30% and will be transferred to a safety position (but will continue the training needed to retain his credentials and keep them updated). A number of employees have been moved for efficiency including:

- 911 Addressing Coordinator to Information Technology to work with GIS.
- Maintenance employee moved to Garage.
- Grounds maintenance moved under supervision of Recreation.

A 2 ½ % cost of living increase is included to become effective in August 2008.

Health insurance costs increased 15.2%. Alexander County pays an annual health insurance premium for all full-time employees and retirees with 20 years of service – this will change to 30 years of service effective July 1, 2008. The total premium paid is \$1.7 million. A Wellness Program was introduced last fall and will become more effective in the upcoming year. A random drug testing program for all full-time and part-time safety sensitive positions or positions requiring driving as an essential function of the job will become effective on July 1, 2008. The reason for the program is to provide a safe environment for employees and citizens alike. In addition, Alexander County will adopt a written Motor Vehicles and Mobile Equipment Policy in June.

An appropriation of \$5 million has been budgeted for education and \$150,000 is included for the County's portion of debt service for the auditorium.

The County currently has 4,487 water customers in the Bethlehem (2,316), Highway 16 South (1,309), and Sugar Loaf (862) systems. The County is recommending the base water rate be increased from \$16.58 to \$18.00 or 7.8% and from \$3.00 to \$3.15 per thousand gallons on the volume rate. This is in response to a 4.1% increase by the City of Hickory. The remainder of the increase will go towards water system improvements.

Alexander County will be forced to increase the landfill tipping fee from \$50.00 to \$60.00 per ton to offset the cost of Senate Bill 1492 which relates to permitting fees, consumer price index with contractors, environmental fees, and fuel index surcharges. The buffer around the landfill needs to be expanded, which will account for \$4.00 of the increase. The additional amount will not impact fees at convenience sites.

In relation to debt service, \$249,495 is budgeted for our second payment on the Industrial Park property. This is the final payment.

Gas prices have increased over 31% within the past year. The 2007 price for fuel was \$2.68 per gallon and the current price is \$3.44. Alexander County budgeted \$220,000 for fuel. The Sheriff's Department, EMS, Transportation, and the landfill use 80% of the County's fuel. Transportation will be merged with the cities of Newton, Conover, and Hickory and the counties of Caldwell, Burke, and Catawba on July 1, 2008 forming the new Western Piedmont Regional Transportation Authority. Therefore, the Transportation Department will not be included in the upcoming budget, but \$9,511 will be appropriated for Alexander County's contribution to the WPRTA, a much smaller amount than \$360,000 for an entire departmental budget.

Medicaid costs continue to be reduced and have dropped from \$1,316,000 in 2007-2008 to \$977,000 in 2008-2009. Article 44 sales tax was reduced from \$1,286,000 to \$972,000 on the revenue side as part of the Medicaid swap.

On the 2009-2010 horizon, the law enforcement and detention center project awaits. The project is estimated to cost in excess of \$10 million or \$1 million annually in debt service payments. The County Commissioners and the Sheriff have discussed the project at length with members of the Jail Committee and there is no easy solution to this matter. A

public hearing was held regarding the jail on May 19, 2008 and a second public hearing has been scheduled for June 16, 2008.

Mr. French also presented several graphs and charts that reviewed information related to general fund expenditures and fund balance comparisons between budget years and with other counties as well as tax rates and revenues generated by one cent on the property tax rate. Also reviewed was a pie chart representing outstanding debt as of June 30, 2008 and debt service payments over the next 5 years.

Mr. French took this opportunity to thank all employees, department heads, and the Finance Department staff for their commitment to the budget process.

Commissioner Odom suggested staff develop some budget information packets that could be provided to the public regarding the budget if requested.

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

Members of the Board conveyed their appreciation to Mr. French, Finance Director Jennifer Herman, and the departments.

NORTHEAST WATER PROJECT UPDATE

Rod Watts, EnergyUnited Water Corporation, presented a slide show of photos from Rocky Springs Road, Rocky Face Church Road, and Allen Road where water lines are currently being installed. He stated that 2.7 miles of the project had been completed and noted that installation of lines on Sulphur Springs Road would be moved up on the priority list to allow the NC Department of Transportation to repave and widen the road as planned.

He informed the Board that staff would begin setting some meters very soon; pointing out that EnergyUnited would increase their tap fees from \$675 to \$1,000 on July 1, 2008. Mr. Watts reported that many citizens had already paid their tap fee to avoid the increase and urged the public to do the same.

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE DAY UPDATE

Josh Mitchell, Solid Waste Director, discussed items collected at the Household Hazardous Waste Day held on April 26, 2008, which included:

- 10,600 lbs. of paint
- 2,450 lbs. of mixed solvent
- 2,500 lbs. of electronics

- 2,478 lbs. of miscellaneous hazardous waste

He stated that a total of 18,028 lbs. of hazardous waste was collected compared to 20,722 lbs. in 2007. Mr. Mitchell stated that the day ran smoothly and that citizens appreciated the opportunity to dispose of these items.

Other items mentioned included disposal of electronics and car batteries at convenience sites. Mr. Mitchell stated that those items were now accepted at all convenience sites with the exception of Vashti and Bethlehem for the time being; however, he noted that televisions could not be accepted. He also hoped to be able to accept oil filters at convenience sites in the near future.

Mr. Mitchell discussed recycling rates per year, pointing out that Alexander County's recycling rate was 75th in the state in 2004 at 54 ½ lbs. per person, at 48th in the state in 2006 at 92 lbs. per person, and 37th in the state in 2007 at 116 lbs. per person. He reported that Alexander County had doubled its state rating in 3 years without spending any taxpayer dollars, but by offering incentive programs such as the Household Hazardous Waste Day and the Clean Alexander Day and also promoting the benefits of recycling.

The Board thanked Mr. Mitchell for his efforts.

HIDDENITE SEWER PROJECT UPDATE

Rick French, County Manager, provided photos of pipe being prepared for installation at Craftmaster Furniture in Hiddenite. He stated that NCDOT and NCDENR approvals had delayed the project but noted that Neill Grading planned to begin construction this week.

JAIL PROJECT UPDATE

Rick French, County Manager, briefly discussed the public hearing held on the jail project on May 19, 2008. He stated that a second public hearing would be held at the June 16, 2008 Commissioners' Meeting and mentioned that the Board would possibly need to hold a work session before officially selecting a site for the jail.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

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

Chairman Yoder explained that the purpose of the Public Comment Period was to allow citizens to address comments and concerns with the Board on issues not listed as agenda items for the meeting. He stated that the Public Comment Period was allowed during the first meeting of each month.

ADOPTION OF THE 2008 COMMISSIONERS' MEETING SCHEDULE (JULY-DECEMBER 2008)

Chairman Yoder presented the last 6 months of the 2008 Commissioners' Meeting Schedule as follows:

July 21, 2008 (only one meeting in July)	October 6, 2008 October 20, 2008
August 4, 2008 August 18, 2008	November 3, 2008 November 17, 2008
September 8, 2008 September 22, 2008	December 1, 2008 (only one meeting in December)

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve the last 6 months of the 2008 Commissioners' Meeting Schedule as presented. Commissioner Robertson seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

COMMUNITY GRANTS UPDATE

Rick French, County Manager, informed the Board that 9 community grant applications were received and that all were eligible to receive grant funding after July 1, 2008. Grants will match 50% of the cost of materials for the project up to \$1,000. The following applications were accepted.

- Little River Ruritan Club – expansion of parking lot for community building
- Ellendale Ruritan Club – New roof for community building
- Alexander County Crime Stoppers – Tazer for Sheriff's Department
- Vashti Fire Department – Emergency backup generator
- Backpack Program – Expansion of backpack program in Hiddenite
- Wittenburg Fire Department – Construction of permanent medical helipad
- Habitat for Humanity – Expansion of cardboard recycling program
- Forgiven Ministry – Support for One Day with God Camp
- Taylorsville Rotary Club – Support for materials for Christmas Shopping Spree for needy children

Mr. French stated that grant winners would be recognized at a July Commissioners' Meeting.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #53 & #54

Rick French, County Manager, discussed the purpose of Budget Amendments #53 and #54, which included the following information:

Budget Amendment #53 – To increase the budgets for the Resource Center and Pre-Trial Release to accommodate the director’s position becoming full-time. To increase the EMS budget for the purchase of necessary equipment for the new ambulance ordered.

Budget Amendment #54 – To increase the budget for adjustments in salary and wages, FICA, insurance, and retirement line items.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #53 and #54. Commissioner Odom 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. County Commissioners from Alexander, Caldwell, and McDowell Counties are invited to attend the last Foothills Mental Health Board Meeting on Thursday, June 26, 2008 in Morganton at 6:00 PM. A meal will be held following a short business session.
- B. The next regular meeting is scheduled for June 16, 2008. An additional meeting will be held on June 23, 2008 for a special recognition and end-of-year budget amendments.

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

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Minutes from the May 19, 2008 Regular Commissioners’ Meeting.
- B. Permit Reimbursement Request from Alexander County Habitat for Humanity.

Commissioner Robertson made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Bolick 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 THE DISCLOSURE OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CONTRACTUAL, & PERSONNEL

Commissioner Robertson made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 6:49 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 Odom made a motion to adjourn at 8:43 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