

**MINUTES**  
**CHATHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**BUDGET WORK SESSION, MAY 29, 2001**

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The Board of Commissioners (“the Board”) of the County of Chatham, North Carolina, met in the Chatham Central High School Auditorium, 14950 Highway 902 West, Bear Creek, North Carolina, at 7:00 PM on May 29, 2001.

Present: Chair Gary Phillips; Vice Chair Margaret Pollard, Commissioners Bob Atwater, Rick Givens, and Carl Outz; County Manager, Charlie Horne; County Attorney, Robert L. Gunn; Assistant County Manager, Paul Spruill; and Finance Officer, Vicki McConnell

The Chairman welcomed those in attendance and the meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM.

**PUBLIC INPUT SESSION**

- **Colonel Gerald Totten**, 108 Petty Road, Siler City, NC, spoke with regard to the increase in grants, and pointed out the “baggage” associated with the grants. He discussed the 19 percent increase in the number of employees since 1996 and the increase in personnel costs of 68 percent since 1997. He discussed the board’s budget increases associated with Board salaries and salaries in the Management Office, and asked the Board to take fiscal control given the size of these increases over four years. He quoted Harry Truman stating, “I never did give anybody hell; I just told the truth and they thought it was hell.”

**Joe Burke**, 125 Mt. Gilead Church Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that he related the tax rate directly to the size of the budget. He cited the John Locke Foundation’s study that documented the portion of a state citizen’s income associated with State and Local Government and stated that the two added together equal 11.6 percent of a North Carolinian’s income. He asked the Board to consider the total picture of the State Government and Federal Government with the Local Government, an overall 35 percent increase, and urged them to “hold the line” on taxes. He defined the local government tax burden by County with Dare County carrying the heaviest burden when dividing the total taxes collected by the County by total income. He stated that under the old valuation, Chatham was ranked 77<sup>th</sup>, which was reasonable. He noted that under the new valuation, the tax burden would greatly increase overnight. He asked if our personal income is going to increase proportionate to the 75 cent rate. He then asked if the Board wanted to dramatically increase the tax burden to the citizens. He concluded by challenging the Board to meet their responsibility of providing an affordable budget.

**Benny Lee**, 1789 Clarence McKeithan Road, Sanford, NC, tobacco farmer, stated that he wanted to speak about “tobacco taxes” or taxes on tobacco allotments. He stated that Harnett County does not tax tobacco allotments; that Lee County values allotments at \$5.00 per acre; that since 1997, tobacco allotments have dropped 50 percent; that as a result, farmers do not need as much tobacco equipment, but still must pay taxes on it; that this year the Chatham quota is \$1,370,000 and calculates to \$25 per acre which a farmer must pay; that Chatham’s taxation of tobacco allotments is overtaxed relative to other counties; and that no other farm products are being taxed.

**Laura Lauffer**, 330 Hatley Road, Pittsboro, NC, expressed support for the Recreation Budget. She described the survey and focus group process over the past few years and stated that there are more people

interested in recreational opportunities for youth. She cited comments from some focus groups from older and younger citizens, and mentioned that she recognized that other local governments are dealing with tight budget issues due to large Medicaid increases. She pointed out the benefits of recreation in offsetting these costs in the long term, and asked that the County Government be a partner in recreation services.

**Andy Wilke**, Goldston, NC, asked citizens to come to the remaining two public hearings. He cited the amount that went into fund balance last year, and pondered why this overage could not have been credited to the budget. He suggested that looking to this overage as a way of supporting the budget would allow a lower rate of around 50 cents. He asked that property owners be given an opportunity to adjust to the new revaluation by means of a lower rate. He stated that this would give citizens an opportunity to speak at the polls during the next election.

**Terry White**, 45 Maverick Ranch Road, Pittsboro, NC, thanked the Board for the job that they do. She went on to document the participation of Chatham County citizens in fighting against taxation without representation, and stated her concern for the County since moving here in 1968. She pleaded with the Board to continue protecting the rural character of the County as they did with the landfill and the rock quarry requests. She reminded the Commissioners that money generated from livestock farms stays in Chatham County. She cited the \$1,000,000 payroll per week the poultry industry puts into its workers' pockets and the total weekly payoff from poultry of \$2,000,000 per week. She voiced concern with regard to the ongoing livestock regulation combined with the large tax increase, the wasteful spending on parks and a judicial center, and stated that a 75 cent tax rate would put farmers out of business. She spoke against a new school in Northeast Chatham and expressed support for the funds to go to teachers and instructors as opposed to buildings. She spoke against the County's lack of action in investigating JOCCA and Smart Start while an employee who embezzled \$4,000 was prosecuted. She spoke against the \$35,000 study to find out if Chatham County employees were underpaid. She summed up an experience with her teenagers where she deprived another nickel until they learned to take care of what they already had.

**John Strickland**, 1092 Dewitt Smith Road, Pittsboro, NC, asked what it would take to get folks mad enough to get rid of Margaret Pollard and Rick Givens at the next election and the other two at the election after that? He stated that there would be a tax revolt in Chatham County; that this is the birth of the next tax revolt; that he is a veteran and has his limited income; that he wanted to express his displeasure for fees associated with power polls, wells, septic tanks, and impact fees; that he feels an individual should be able to build his own home to his own standards; that he wondered if the Commissioners would soon tax the air they breathe; that with Medicaid increases, it characterizes the fact that it is purely for legal and illegal Mexicans coming into the County.

Chairman Phillips asked Mr. Strickland to speak about the budget.

Mr. Strickland switched his line of thought to the drying revenue stream called taxes. He asked that the County consider water extensions and cutting government. He reminded people of a promise from long ago that everyone would have water. He cited the Commissioners four to one vote to build a public park adjacent to Chatham Central High School and characterized this as a lower priority than extending water to people in need of it. He cited his displeasure with the proposed park at Jordan Lake and his disbelief that the County is only interested in the site as a result of the potential water intake. He cited the lack of need for more Sheriff deputies on the force or at schools and for the County having two assistant county managers. He cited his displeasure that the County continues to give JOCCA funding when misspending has occurred without explanation. He stated that the tax value should be no more than 50 cents, and believes anything more than 50 to 55 cents is a burden. He asked that the Commissioners set such a rate, and then make the budget fit that rate.

**Roy Coltrane**, 672 Poe Road, Siler City, NC, stated that he was a World War II Veteran and asked the crowd to fight the increase. He asked any Commissioner to come and visit his overvalued property and offered to deed it to the County if the County pays the same rate for the land as it is valued.

**Glenn Dunn**, 115 Willis Dunn Road, Bear Creek, NC, CPA, farmer, and appointment to the Orange Person Chatham Mental Health Board, stated that four out of five Commissioners are from elsewhere, leaving the County to be ruled by outsiders. He spoke against a proposed high school and proposed tax increase. He asked the citizens to fight the growing spending. He asked that citizens not allow Chatham to be turned into Orange County. He cited unfairness, embarrassment, and disgrace due to Chatham's losing marijuana and \$500,000. He challenged Commissioner Atwater as the deciding vote.

**Gene Brooks**, address unknown, thanked the Board for allowing the people across the County to speak. He cited the Battle of Alamance as part of Chatham's history when Chatham citizens fought to oppose taxation. He mentioned his understanding of the anger folks are expressing about taxes given, its increased burden. He reminded citizens of the responsibility the Towns of Siler City and Pittsboro have to set a low rate in response to the revaluation. He spoke against current recreation development plans and plans for courthouse construction/expansion. He spoke of Townsend's importance and the importance of farmers in general. He also spoke of the challenge of raising families by single parents and the burden on older citizens. He urged the Board not to lay-off deputies and teachers. He spoke of his confusion over the "tourism business", and asked the Commissioners to look at the total burden across all levels of government and think about cutting back.

**Sam White**, 145 Maverick Ranch Road, Pittsboro, NC, asked the audience to tell him where they were on this night three months ago. He stated that he could not remember, but that in general, people only remember the hassles they experience for three months. He expressed his displeasure that the County was bringing a water line from Sanford to 3M as opposed to accepting Pittsboro's offer to provide 3M with water. He mentioned the four things as follows: 1) Find out who stole County money from various organizations (JOCCA, Health Department, wherever); 2) Stop the persecution of hog farms in Chatham County by dropping legal action to appeal Court of Appeals ruling; 3) Hold a Countywide retirement banquet for Jimmy Collins given the poor way he has been treated; 4) Dismiss the County Manager

**Mary Frances Davis**, address unknown, asked that the County cut back on spending. She expressed her displeasure with voice mail and asked for a hotline to report waste in County government. She further asked that the tax rate be set at 50 cents.

**Elizabeth Dixon**, address unknown, asked that citizens accept a petition and distribute it to their neighbors to investigate the missing \$500,000 from various agencies including JOCCA and Smart Start. She reminded the audience that Carl Outz made a motion last fall to investigate the lost money, but that it died. She then challenged the crowd to pass a letter to the various Senators requesting an investigation, and asked the crowd to congratulate Carl Outz for making such a motion.

**Nancy Turner**, asked for improved services as it relates to EMS, Sheriff, and water and asked the Board to cut back on the excess. She asked the Board to consider the needs of the people in the room.

### **COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**

Chairman Phillips thanked those in attendance and reminded them of the next two meetings.

Commissioner Givens thanked each one who spoke and expressed their opinions in a gentlemanly or

lady-like manner.

Commissioner Atwater expressed his commitment to provide for the needs of the County balance against the input he received.

Commissioner Pollard reemphasized her commitment to continue listening to the input received at the remaining public hearings and her challenge to make a decision that is right for the County.

Chairman Phillips stated his commitment to try to meet the diverse needs of the County. He emphasized his belief that every member of the Board is trying his or her best to do what is right for Chatham County. He asked for the continued support for members of the Board.

Commissioner Outz suggested that Chatham look at surrounding counties and try to cut expenditures in the same way as its neighbors. He stated his unwillingness to vote for a budget unless it is set way below 75 cents. He stated that he knew of no other industry that received a 50 percent increase in revenue in any given year. He restated his commitment to recreation through grants and fellowship among citizens who raise funds to support such projects.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Chairman adjourned the meeting.

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Gary Phillips, Chairman

ATTEST:

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Sandra B. Lee, Clerk to the Board  
Chatham County Board of Commissioners