

MINUTES
CHATHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET WORK SESSION, MAY 31, 2001

The Board of Commissioners (“the Board”) of the County of Chatham, North Carolina, met in the Northwood High School Auditorium, 310 Northwood High School Road, Pittsboro, North Carolina, at 7:00 PM on May 31, 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 7:10 PM.

PUBLIC INPUT SESSION

Dr. Ward, address unknown, spoke about the importance of recreation as a result of obesity.

Colonel Totten, 108 Petty Road, Siler City, NC, expressed concern about accuracy and value of statistics provided that represent department performance measures. He stated that he thinks that the County bookmobile should be a low priority.

Barbara McCoy, 3557 Pea Ridge Road, New Hill, NC, stated that as a landowner, she is opposed to the 75 cent tax rate; that a farmer’s fields and pastures drive up his burden; that she is concerned that farms will be sold to developers; that she suggests prioritization; and that she proposes schools embrace an after school YMCA program.

Peter Theye, 1065 Boothe Hill Road, Chapel Hill, NC, spoke in defense of the proposed budget and his concern about misinformation and intimidation. He asked for a higher tax rate and thought about creative means of taxation, by high school districts or otherwise.

Paul McCoy, 3557 Pea Ridge Road, New Hill, NC, expressed concern about the proposed tax rate and the likelihood of closing factories and farms and the reality of wall-to- wall houses.

Cathy Head, 175 Rabbit Run, Pittsboro, NC, stated that she can not afford the taxes on her mother’s farm at the proposed rate. She made a special plea to Commissioner Atwater with regard to representation of farmers (including hog farmers), and asked him and other Commissioners to do the right thing.

Linda Ornt, Triangle Reading Service, 211-103 E. Six Forks Road, Raleigh, NC, stated that Chatham County has thirty-one citizens subscribing to Triangle Reading Service at an approximate cost of \$100 per subscriber. She asked Commissioners for funding assistance in an effort to assist elderly get in-depth local news.

Jason Buchanan, PO Box 242, Siler City, NC, stated that he moved to Chatham from Davie County; that he is strongly opposed to the proposed tax rate; that he has no problem with Smart Start spending and JOCCA spending, but is conservative fiscally and wants a search conducted for the missing funds.

Ray Greenlaw, 2 Jordan Drive, Pittsboro, NC, reflecting on the comments of Commissioners, stated that he would like two alternative budget proposals put forth from staff, 55 cents and 60 cents, respectively, that still meets priorities of Board of Commissioners. He stated that he would like the Board to ensure more careful accountability from departments by closely examining programmatic objectives

Phil Bors, 174 Woodberry Forest Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that he is interested in sufficient recreation funding for the County, given his role in the organization known as Healthy Chatham. He spoke of the benefits of recreational opportunities, and asked for increased access to schools.

Joyce Baird, 370 Gallup Road, Chapel Hill, NC, thanked the Commissioners for their service to the County. She expressed a concern for the way the money is spent or not spent in the school system, stating that her husband is a teacher, and that schools are not being maintained as they should be. She stated that problems are ignored until they are too expensive; that physical condition of the grounds is a concern; that gym floors need to be refinished; that she thinks the County needs to pay for these; that she feels more funding is needed for extracurricular activities in middle schools; and that she is concerned that parents are removing their children from Chatham schools and sending them to private schools.

Craig Debussey, 119 Tanager Lane, Chapel Hill, NC, in his role on Chatham Economic Board and Recreation Master Planning Committee, thinks that more than one County park is needed for 50,000 residents; that better use needs to be made of the facilities that the County has; that he thinks there is misinformation about recreation; that he would like to point out that the FY 2002 recreation budget is actually lower than last year; that he would like for the Board to support the proposal for development of a community park in the southwestern part of the County; and that he would also like the Board to support the proposed Industrial Park development project.

Phillip Cates, 112 Russell Chapel Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that he speaks separate from his role as the Executive Director of the Chatham County Parks Foundation. He thanked the Board for reviewing the material relative to its highest and lowest priorities in the School Board Budget stating that the capital reserve set aside for schools is not a good idea. He stated that it is more critical that these funds be dedicated to operating expenses; that supplements need to continue and need to be increased for principals; that he does have sympathy for the Commissioners role. He suggested giving the school system everything they have asked for and holding them accountable for what they are given.

Max Cotton, 133 Pittsboro School Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that the industrial parks and recreation facilities should be subjected to a vote of the people before tax money is dedicated to these purposes; that he feels the cost over the long term for parks are too expensive; that the State and Feds cannot maintain their parks with all the resources they have and neither can Chatham County; that the Commissioners provide more funds to schools to maintain recreational facilities if the schools are going to share the facilities with the public; that the budget from fund balance is an indicator of overspending and an attempt to maintain fund balance at 20 percent of the General Fund expenditures is wrong; that he wonders if the transfer into the water fund represents property taxes; that the Board should stick to the basics; and that there is two million dollars of property in Pittsboro that the County owns but the Board can not tax. He spoke briefly about the Old Sanford Road water line and the fact that the County did not participate in a two-way negotiation. He said a letter was sent proposing terms to Commissioner Givens and Pollard from which a response was never received.

Mark Thompson, 133 Carson Court, Pittsboro, NC, stated that whomever did the revaluations made a big mistake and whomever proposed the 75 cent tax rate is making a big mistake.

Ed King, 118 Baldwin Farm Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that he is concerned that his son has a place in which to participate in recreation in Pittsboro. He stated that he wants to endorse a YMCA after-school program to include a pool; and that he wants to support a 75 cent rate because he feels it is an investment in his children.

Herbert Gaines, 4284 Siler City Glendon Road, Bear Creek, NC, stated that he does not want to throw rocks at Commissioners; that he would like three of the five to discuss their position on the tax rate; that he proposes that revaluation happened this year not next year as a result of upcoming elections; that he assures Commissioners, however, that the citizens will not forget. He recounted a crunch time situation at the Federal level, and asked the Commissioners to direct the County Manager to submit a budget based on a maximum of 55 cent rate.

Richard Manning, PO Box 106, Pittsboro, NC, urged the Board to focus on a realistic budget and better prioritization.

Karen Martin, 38 Turtle Creek Drive, Pittsboro, NC, expressed concern with regard to the proposed park at Jordan Lake, citing cost and revenue figures from the Operational Management Plan. He stated that there are too many unknowns to count on the Parks Foundation to raise enough private funds to build and maintain the proposed park.

Joe Burke, 125 Mt. Gilead Church Road, Pittsboro, NC, urged adoption of a budget based on needs rather than want. He stated that he is for recreation, but is concerned with regard to needs versus wants. He encouraged the Board to take responsibility for spending wisely. He implored the others to get recreation on their own through working in the garden and cutting grass.

Richard Bradley, 929 NC #87 North, Pittsboro, NC, expressed support that Commissioner Givens assertion that 59 cents is the right tax rate, but challenged him on the Pittsboro water controversy. He asked the Board to stop overlapping services in an effort to cut the budget. He suggested cutting nonprofit funding, holding court at night, and sharing facilities for different purposes (ie: community college and high schools). He asked the Board to set a reasonable rate for taxes and match the budget to the rate.

James Wheeler, address unknown, expressed concern that the County controls land use too tightly and the school board too loosely. He spoke against building the proposed new high school, suggesting an expansion at Northwood. He spoke in disfavor of Chatham Recreation Department and the fees for programs, spoke against the 3M water line extension from Sanford, and challenged the Board to consider the impact of the tax rate on the citizens of Chatham County.

Charles Lutterloh, address unknown, spoke against revaluation and tax increase. He asked the Board to think about families, young couples, and elderly. He spoke in favor of the use of school facilities for recreation purposes, suggested that Chatham residents be exempt from paying park entry fees, and spoke about long-term maintenance expenses for parks.

John Strickland, 1092 Dewitt Smith Road, Pittsboro, NC, complained that he was issued a summons to appear in court for taking a budget book from the County Offices without paying for it.

Gene Brooks, spoke against building parks and encouraged a referendum by district on parks. He suggested freezing this year's budget until the fiscal picture clears up a bit, criticized the request from the School Board for such a large amount, and suggested an appropriation from reserves to cover funding gaps as opposed to raising taxes. He apologized on behalf of the Pittsboro Town Board for miscommunication and invited the Commissioners to meet to discuss and "iron out" the 3M water line issue.

Andy Wilkie, stated that he does not believe too many people would complain if they paid the same taxes next year that they paid this year.

Terry White, 145 Maverick Ranch Road, Pittsboro, NC, stated that citizens need to assume responsibilities on their own for certain “noncritical” County needs. She offered statistics relative to school performance and wondered if we get what we pay for when our school spending per student is 9th in the state.

Jay Hilliard, address unknown, stated that he is concerned with regard to the financial effect of the tax rate. He asked Commissioners to bring closure to the tax rate issue, stating that he does not understand why three Commissioners will not move to reduce the tax rate immediately. He went on to complain about the revaluation on his property.

Johnathan Manning, address unknown, asked the Board to cut back on spending and fund basic needs. He criticized the Travel and Tourism Department, School Board funding, assigning vehicles to each deputy, the number of lawsuits relative to personnel, continuation of the hog ordinance legal fight, and spoke against the construction of another courthouse. He asked the Commissioners to work with the School Board to open up facilities to the public for recreation, and asked that they do a better job of recruiting industry.

Ken Harris, 2219 NC #42, Moncure, NC, criticized lawsuits, landfill, park, courthouse, revaluation, and tax rate. He asked that the County’s leadership represent its citizens, and asked for money to be spent on water and sewer investments.

Sam White, 145 Maverick Ranch Road, Pittsboro, NC, told a story of the great depression. The main character was deep pockets. He was a businessman.

Elizabeth Dixon, 2861 Mt. Vernon Springs Road, Siler City, NC, talked about the Jimmy Collins issue. She stated that she would like to see high salaries cut, and Jimmy Collins given a bonus.

Larry Ballas, 139 Indian Creek Lane, Apex, NC, wonders if the budget has fluff in it that can be cut. He suggested using a citizens committee to assist in constructing a budget.

James Roberson, 565 Pete Roberson Road, Pittsboro, NC, spoke against recreation. He stated that he thought paying impact fees would relieve the tax burden. He stated that he would not like to see more deputies in the Sheriff’s Department.

Jack Roberson, 89 Roberson Road, Pittsboro, NC, spoke against the four-year valuation cycle stating that he thinks it should remain at every eight years. He spoke against North Chatham Fire Department’s purchase of a ladder truck, and encouraged the Commissioners to tighten their belts.

Gerald Smith, 5291 Hwy. #87 North, Pittsboro, NC, stated that he is concerned about six- wheel utility vehicles driving back and forth to work. He stated that he is also concerned about other opportunities to make cuts.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Givens stated that he would make a motion Monday and that Commissioner Outz would second it to send the budget back to the County Manager and ask for a 56 cent budget.

Commissioner Outz echoed concerns and mentioned that the County needs to look for ways to cut

spending. He stated that he is not talking about cutting employees, but is looking at any way possible to cut the budget.

Commissioner Atwater stated that he is trying to understand each citizen's comments; that he is not prepared to guess at a tax rate; that he is looking forward to the budget work sessions where he will examine proposed cuts, examine the rate, and make a decision.

Commissioner Pollard thanked the crowd for coming and for the ideas presented that may assist the County in saving money. She further explained the process where the Commissioners hear from the public and then sit down and go through the budget to make cuts and additions. She promised a judicious effort at making a decision.

Chairman Phillips outlined the challenge of dropping the rate to 55 cents as equal to a challenge of cutting \$10,000,000. He explained that this may mean large cuts in schools, Sheriff's Department, and every other department.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman adjourned the meeting.

Gary Phillips, Chairman

ATTEST:

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