

CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JOINT MEETING WITH THE CUMBERLAND COUNTY LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION
APRIL 28, 2008, 12:00 NOON
Charlie Rose Agri-Expo Center
I.B. Julian Auditorium

PRESENT:

Chairman Breeden Blackwell
Commissioner Kenneth Edge
Commissioner John Henley
Commissioner Billy King
Commissioner Ed Melvin
Commissioner Diane Wheatley
Senator Tony Rand
Representative Marvin Lucas
Representative Margaret Dickson
Representative Rick Glazier
Rosemary Zimmerman, Social Services Interim Director
James Martin, County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager
Amy Cannon, Assistant County Manager
Grainger Barrett, County Attorney
Harvey Raynor, Deputy County Attorney
Sara VanderClute, Public Information Officer
Tom Cooney, Public Utilities Director
Tom Lloyd, Planning/Inspections Director
Cecil Combs, Planning/Inspections Deputy Director
Marie Colgan, Deputy Clerk

Chairman Blackwell thanked the administrative team for setting up the meeting and welcomed everyone. Commissioner Wheatley gave an invocation.

1. State-wide database map showing locations of groundwater and other types of contaminations (Tom Lloyd, Director, Planning/Inspections Department and Tom Cooney, Director, Public Utilities Department)

Attendees were provided a handout and Mr. Cooney informed attendees of recent incidents in Cumberland County which have created bad publicity and concern about health issues due to contaminated ground water. As a result of these incidents, a Safe Water Task Force was created by County Management to address those issues. The Task Force determined that both a county and a statewide problem exists and that there is no central database within the various DENR divisions which would provide the needed information. Each division has its own information, but it has not been shared with other divisions. Senator Rand acknowledged that they were aware of this fact. A map was provided showing various problem areas within Cumberland County. It is hoped that a type of statewide registry, similar to the sex offender registry, can be devised which would be available for public access to locate potential problem areas. Mr. Lloyd added that local planning and zoning is also affected by lack of information on these problem areas. Mr. Martin noted that there are two issues, one is the needed database and the other is what to do to resolve problems that are found, but that DENR has been very responsive to the problem of communication since the problem came to light. Senator Rand advised that any request needs to come from the state association and it was agreed that Chairman Blackwell will bring this subject up at the NCACC District meeting tomorrow. Attorney Barrett to help with information on how other counties are affected as questioned by Representative Dickson.

2. Social Services Revenue and Foster Care Reimbursement Increase (Rosemary Zimmerman, Director, Social Services Department)

Ms. Zimmerman stated she has two issues to discuss and started with the Child Protective Services Revenue problem. Attendees were provided a handout. Since the local Department of Social Services fully implemented the Multiple Response portion of HB 277, it has experienced a 50% decrease in Title IV-E reimbursements in Child Protective Services due to the way cases are being required to be handled. Ms. Zimmerman shared how Buncombe County has been able to keep their reimbursements up, but feels that its way of doing things has increased caseloads, which in her opinion is not a good answer to the problem. Ms. Zimmerman will get further information on how the backlog of open cases in Buncombe County has affected their agency and will get that information to the delegation. Representative Dickson suggested that the Congressional delegates be contacted since it is a federal requirement and Ms. Zimmerman will take up this issue with the State Association of Social Services Directors.

Ms. Zimmerman stated the second issue is Foster Care rates. Attendees were provided a handout which showed two changes that impact the County's budget regarding funds used to pay private providers for foster care and group home services. In the past, Cumberland County paid the standard board rate to these facilities and the State paid the difference between the standard board rate and the facility's actual rate. A change in reimbursement rates will require that the County pay the full facility rate, resulting in an increase of \$152,664 in the FY 2008-2009 budget. This increase was absorbed due to decreases in other areas but cannot be absorbed on a continuing basis. Board rates for children placed in out of home care are expected to be increased by the General Assembly this year with a projected increase of \$890,742 which has resulted in a supplemental budget request.

3. Discussion regarding legislation that would change the special assessment laws allowing for an increase from the 10-year limitation for payback to up to 15 years for special assessments (Tom Cooney, Director, Public Utilities Department)

Attendees were provided a handout. Mr. Cooney informed members that the county uses its own fund balance to finance projects, with repayment from special assessment. Water and sewer costs have escalated causing hardships for citizens when they have to stay within the maximum 10-year repayment requirement under General Statute 153A-199. Therefore, a request to increase the requirement to 15 years is being made. Senator Rand questioned whether local legislation could accomplish the desired purpose and Attorney Barrett was asked to draft one for approval which will be forwarded to the legislative delegation.

4. Discussion: Increased financial support for Veterans' Services (Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager)

Attendees were provided a handout. Deputy County Manager Pilgrim informed members that in FY07, Veterans Affairs reported 44,263 veterans in Cumberland County and the count continues to increase each year. For a number of years, \$2,000 per year has been received from the Department of Administration as matching funds to counties for the maintenance and operation of the county's veterans' service program. The total county budget for Veterans' Services is \$270,119 so additional funds are desperately needed. A resolution will be adopted by the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners in 2008 and support from the delegation is greatly needed to help look at the formula used for distribution of funds based on veteran population in lieu of across the board payment. A resolution will be passed by the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners and forwarded to the legislative delegation.

5. Discussion: Abandoned Manufactured Home Removal (Cecil Combs, Deputy Director, Planning/Inspections)

Attendees were provided a handout. Mr. Lloyd informed attendees that currently Cumberland County has 900 manufactured homes that were constructed prior to 1977 which cannot be moved or set up in other areas of the county or in most adjacent counties. Abandoned and dilapidated manufactured homes continue to be an issue as they are potential fire hazards and sources of toxins that are emitted into the environment, resulting in a serious burden for the county in their deconstruction and removal. The average cost for removing these homes is around \$1,500 to \$2,500 per home which would be quite costly for those 900 homes. In 2007, the county caused the demolition and removal of 53 manufactured homes with a total cost of approximately \$100,000. A request has been made and approved for \$25,000 additional dollars to cover the cost for additional homes to be demolished before the end of the fiscal year. Chairman Blackwell advised that a pilot program in the past was partially funded by the Manufacturing Housing Association, but funds ran out. Representative Dickson recalled a bill whereby a charge is set up initially for a fund to help offset the cost for future demolition. Mr. Combs advised that he was informed that HB 1134 has passed the first reading and is continuing to make its round for approval. Mr. Combs will find out the status of the bill and inform the delegation. Representative Dickson stated that the Manufacturing Housing Association needs to be a part of the process. Chairman Blackwell advised that the county will work with the state association on this issue.

6. Discussion: State road funding policy (Grainger Barrett, County Attorney)

Attendees were provided a handout. Attorney Barrett stated that the General Assembly passed legislation last summer that approved authority for a county to participate in the cost of transportation projects. The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners is concerned that the state's transportation deficit will be shifted to county governments. Some examples of cost shifting are using ½ of the secondary roads financing monies, probably from the trust fund, to finance a \$1.8 million dollar state bond issue. The concern with this example is that the maintenance of secondary roads will be starved to the point that the counties are forced to get involved. Another example would disrupt the priority and funding available for other projects for which other localities are not providing voluntary funding and would therefore put localities into funding competition with each other. Commissioner Edge informed members that if the counties have to take responsibility for the local road system that it would cause almost a six cent tax increase just to keep them in their present condition. Chairman Blackwell thanked the delegation for the removal of the Medicaid obligation and emphasized that the counties statewide are concerned that the transportation issue could become another financial burden. Senator Rand agreed that the delegation needs to proceed with caution regarding this issue.

7. Other matters

Attorney Barrett asked to speak on a subject not listed regarding a recent request from Commissioner King regarding options for establishing a Regional Transportation Authority. Attorney Barrett stated that the assistance of the General Assembly delegation would be needed in order to do this and wanted to make them aware of the possibility. It was agreed that it would be a long process and would not be ready for the short session.

Commissioner Wheatley advised that at the recent NCACC District meeting that a great deal of discussion revolved around Mental Health reform and wanted to emphasize the difficulties and the needs regarding this issue. Commissioner Edge added that practical plans need to be made as trying to find 30 additional psychiatrists as suggested is unrealistic. Representative Dickson stated that a legislative breakfast was recently held by Mental Health and direction was received from that meeting regarding this issue.

Meeting Adjourned 1:15 pm