
Minutes
Cumberland County Board of Commissioners
June 5, 2000, 5:30 PM
Special Meeting - Budget Session

PRESENT: Chairman Edward G. Melvin, Jr.
Vice Chairman J. Lee Warren, Jr.
Commissioner Talmage Baggett
Commissioner Billy R. King
Commissioner H. Mac Tyson II
Commissioner Breeden Blackwell
Cliff Strassenburg, County Manager
James Martin, Deputy County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Asst. County Manager
Cliff Spiller, Asst. County Manager
Grainger Barrett, County Attorney
Marsha Fogle, Clerk to the Board
Amy Cannon, Finance Director
County Budget Staff
James Lawson, Personnel Director

Chairman Melvin called the meeting to order.

Mr. Garrett Alexander, Tax Administrator, told the Board that his office has discovered underreported personal property in the approximate amount of \$93 million dollars, which is subject to tax. He also indicated they are looking at another \$40 million. He said they are being very cautious until all of the information has been assimilated. He also noted realization of this additional tax money is not immediate.

BUDGET DISCUSSION

Board members discussed the school request of \$11 million additional money over last fiscal year, noting the Manager's inclusion of \$3 million in his recommended budget for the operation of new schools coming on line.

Commissioner Blackwell suggested that the Board of Commissioners get together with the School Board to establish a "per pupil base budget" every year. He noted the will not help us for fiscal year 2001, but may be helpful in fiscal year 2002.

Commissioner King inquired about whether the school's request contains one-time expenses or recurring expenses. Mr. Strassenburg, County Manager, noted that most of it will be recurring, such as operational cost for the new schools, \$29 million in mandated salaries, \$1.35 million in

cost of living increases for the school system, gas for buses, maintenance, inflationary increases and money for local supplements.

Commissioner Tyson inquired about the County's legal responsibility to the school system and if the County Manager thought the additional \$3 million would meet the requirement. Mr. Strassenburg noted the legal responsibility is to operate a system of free public education. He noted that he believed the additional \$3 million in his recommended budget would provide the appropriate funding to operate the new schools that are coming on line.

It was also noted that 53.7% of the county budget when to the school system this current fiscal year. That is 45 cents of every tax dollar collected by the county (\$50.9 million).

It was also noted that just to bring the County even will take a 10 cent tax increase.

Commissioner Baggett noted concern about the tax rate being so high and how it will affect our ability to draw industry and new business to our county. He said we don't just need to talk about raising taxes, but we also need to address cutting expenditures.

Commissioner Warren noted that voters approved school bonds, library bonds and bonds for FTCC over the past several years. He said that in the future when bonds are approved by the citizens, the tax rate should be adjusted the next fiscal year to pay for the debt service on those bonds, as opposed to waiting several years to make the adjustment.

Commissioner Blackwell noted that the County also was mandated to build a new jail and was also directed by the State to build a new DSS building.

Commissioner Baggett inquired about citizens making voluntary contributions to the school system and if that is something that could be included in the tax bill. The Tax Administrator suggested that perhaps a stuffer could be added to the tax allowing a voluntary contribution, which would be paid by separate check and mailed to the County as opposed to the Lockbox address. This money would be designated for schools. He noted he is finalizing the printing of the tax bills tomorrow and will inquire as to the cost of adding a stuffer.

Commissioner Blackwell said he thought the Board members should go through the budgets and be prepared to offer cuts and/or amendments to the budget at our budget sessions next week. He noted it is not just enough to say we won't raise taxes, we have to have a plan.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:45PM.

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