
Minutes
Cumberland County Board of Commissioners
February 24, 2001, 8:00 a.m.
Special Meeting - Planning Retreat
Cape Fear Valley Health System Board Room

PRESENT: Chairman J. Lee Warren, Jr.
Vice Chairman J. Breeden Blackwell
Commissioner Talmage Baggett
Commissioner Jeannette Council
Commissioner Kenneth Edge
Commissioner John Henley
Commissioner Billy R. King
James Martin, County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Asst. County Manager
Cliff Spiller, Asst. County Manager
Amy Cannon, Asst. County Manager
Grainger Barrett, County Attorney
Tonya Harris-Council, Public Information Officer
Marsha Fogle, Clerk to the Board
Press: Andrew Barksdale (Fayetteville Observer Times)

INVOCATION: Vice Chairman Breeden Blackwell

Retreat Resumes

Chairman Warren noted that at the February 19, 2001 meeting the Board referred the hospital lease issue to the Planning Retreat for discussion.

Commissioner King said that initially the \$3 million payment was to be for 3 – 4 years. However, when Cape Fear Hospital bought Highsmith Hospital the payment term was increased to 28 years. Commissioner King said that Cape Fear Hospital is not in the same financial position today as it was at the time Highsmith was purchased. He said the notion of taking \$3 million for 28 years seems a little much. He suggested a gradual ratcheting down of that fee. Chairman Warren pointed out that the hospital owns some valuable property and this payment is in lieu of taxes. Commissioner Baggett noted that this money is earmarked for education. He also noted that the layoffs at the hospital will bring them back in line with the national benchmark. Commissioner Henley said he did not think this was a good time to make any changes in the payments to the county. Commissioner King pointed out the Board of Commissioners also serves as trustees of the hospital, which he said presents a conflict of interest for the Board. Commissioner King said that perhaps the Board could revisit this issue at some later date.

In discussing the issues related to the difference between revenues and expenditures in the county's budget, the County Manager said the problem needs to be solved this year and does

not need to drag on. He said it is his intention to bring back a budget as directed by the Board and one it can hopefully live with.

Commissioner Edge suggested there be some conversations between county, city and school management to see if there is some way to consolidate some services. Examples of services that may be considered are printing and maintenance on buildings.

Commissioner Blackwell said we have to get serious about consolidation. He suggested a performance audit be done in each department to see how we can streamline our operations.

Chairman Warren noted that in 1997 the County met with the Fayetteville City Council and discussed merging some county and city departments. However, the City has never responded or indicated they were interested. He noted the importance of providing "one stop shopping" for our citizens.

James Martin, County Manager, told the Board the Institute of Government is looking at helping us with a feasibility study on comprehensive planning. Hopefully they will help us identify issues involved in merging departments/governments.

Commissioner Edge noted that the Charlotte Mecklenburg School System saved \$9 million by combining their workman's compensation programs. He recommended we look for ways to save money. He suggested that perhaps we should look in the same area of workman's compensation programs to see if money can be saved by joining with another unit. The County Manager noted our workman's comp charges have decreased in the last couple of years, primarily due to our safety program and the management of our cases.

Chairman Warren thanked Commissioner Council for inviting a student to our commissioners' meeting on February 5 to lead the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance. He suggested we make this a part of our evening meetings. The commissioner responsible for the invocation at the evening meeting would also be responsible for inviting a student to lead the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Council noted she was most thankful and grateful for the good working relationship the Board has. She thanked staff for always being receptive to questions and providing answers in a professional and pleasant manner.

LONG TERM GOALS:

1. Animal Control Building: Commissioner Jeannette suggested we not address building a new building at this time. However, Commissioner Warren suggested we move forward with hiring an architect to draw up some plans.
2. County-wide water/sewer: Commissioner Baggett noted his ongoing interest in county-wide water/sewer. He noted the Board will hold a public hearing at the March 19 meeting on water/sewer for Kelly Hills. While he understands this area needs help, he

suggested we not piecemeal our efforts. He suggested we think "bigger" instead of "smaller". Chairman Warren noted that Wade is going to request the county to appropriate a \$300,000 match so they can secure a grant for \$3 million to address sewer issues in their area. James Martin, County Manager, noted there is a water needs assessment underway at this time. He said this assessment could probably be used in determining population figures for sewer extension also. Commissioner Henley noted the importance of a water/sewer infrastructure and how it affects our ability to attract industry. He noted that 14% of all wells drilled in Cumberland County are contaminated when drilled.

3. Economic Development: Board members noted the importance of infrastructure, shell buildings and multiple sites for industrial expansion. County Manager Martin said he knew of 13 acre site on Dunn Road and 301 that the owner wants to develop as a small technology site. This is a privately funded industrial site. Commissioner Warren noted that the HWY 24 corridor is prime property for development. Commissioner Blackwell encouraged management to develop long range capital plans.

4. Senior Citizens: Commissioner Blackwell noted the importance of doing something to help senior citizens defray the cost of property taxes. He inquired if we could legally freeze property rates for seniors 65 and older. It was noted by the attorney, this would have to be done state-wide.

5. Reducing classroom size: Commissioner Edge noted that Governor Easley is working on reduction of classroom size, which means more schools, teachers, etc. In addition, the Governor is interested in educating four year olds. Commissioner Blackwell noted there are a number of empty classrooms in the schools in Cumberland County. He said he is not convinced there is a need for more schools but rather there may be a need for redistricting, which is not a popular subject for school boards.

Chairman Warren briefly addressed the issue of the length of our board meetings. He suggested that if there are questions about an item on the agenda, that those questions be asked prior the meeting so we do not cause our meetings to run so long. In addition, Commissioner Council suggested it was not necessary for us to comment on each and every item on the agenda. It was also suggested that comments be confined to the current issue.

RECAP OF LONG RANGE PLANS

1. work to find areas where units of government can combine services that will result in efficiencies and perhaps lower cost;
2. move forward with hiring an architect for our animal control facility
3. work towards county-wide water/sewer
4. work at developing multiple industrial sites for economic development
5. work towards establishing a good financial relationship with state government

The Board discussed whether a lobbyist would be helpful to us at the General Assembly in Raleigh. They decided to put this item on the March 19 agenda for discussion.