

CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MAY 23, 2001, 5:30PM
SPECIAL MEETING – BUDGET WORKSHOP
CUMBERLAND COUNTY COURTHOUSE
FAYETTEVILLE, NC

PRESENT: Chairman J. Lee Warren, Jr.
Vice Chairman Breeden Blackwell
Commissioner Jeannette Council
Commissioner Kenneth Edge
Commissioner John Henley
Commissioner Talmage Baggett
Commissioner Billy R. King
James Martin, County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager
Amy Cannon, Asst. County Manager/Finance Director
Cliff Spiller, Asst. County Manager
Grainger Barrett, County Attorney
Marsha Fogle, Clerk to the Board
Budget Staff

INVOCATION: Commissioner Billy King

Chairman Warren called the meeting to order.

Chairman Warren asked Board members if for any reason they would be willing to raise taxes. Commissioner King responded he would. The Chairman said that because only one commissioner has indicated he would raise taxes; it is clear the only question to be answered is whether or not the Board wants to allocate \$1.7 million back to some of the departments. He noted this is the only revenue we have to work with based on the policy that was adopted at the May 21, 2001 meeting.

James Martin, County Manager, noted that the fire department tax rates are all 10 cents, except Manchester has asked for an increase in the rate from 10 cents to 13.5 cents. Commissioner King noted Manchester really does need an increase. Commissioner Baggett noted that Westarea is losing some of its territory and tax revenue, and we should check to see if they would be willing to contract with Spring Lake at their current rate of 10 cents. Chairman Warren suggested we also check with Harnett County and Anderson Creek to see if they would be willing to cover the area.

Commissioner Baggett noted we took \$22.4 million from the Fund Balance last year to balance the budget. He said to take just 3% this year is a big drop and a hard fall. He inquired if we could reduce our dependency on the Fund Balance by 50% for the next couple of years, as opposed to dropping to the 3% figure.

James Martin, County Manager, noted that of the \$22.4 million we appropriated last year we will spend about \$16 million. Mr. Martin said if we appropriate the full 3% we will a fund balance that is 10.5% of our budget. He suggested that counties of our size generally keep between a 16 and 18% fund balance.

Commissioner Blackwell suggested that Juanita Pilgrim, Deputy County Manager, contact the Health Department Director and CEO of the hospital to see if there are any programs that the Hospital could absorb, such as school nurses, etc. Commissioner Henley said there may be some other programs the Hospital could look at also. Note: School Nurse Budget for this current fiscal year as of 12/31/00 is \$829,881.

Commissioner King inquired about cost of school crossing guards. It is \$460,000.

Chairman Warren noted the importance of the Mosquito Program in the county. Cost: \$55,900.

Commissioner Council asked if departments have a list of priority items they would like to go back into their budget if money is available. She also asked if the county had put enough money in the budget to take care of the increase in cost of fuel and electricity. Commissioner Council suggested that instead of spending the \$1.7 million we put it back in the Fund Balance to be used for emergencies that may come up during the fiscal year.

Commissioner Henley said he would like to see a priority list from the departments on what they would like to put back in, if money were available.

Commissioner Edge said Commissioner Council makes a good point about putting the \$1.7 back into the Fund Balance. He said we should put every penny away that we can so we don't have this problem next year. Commissioner Edge said it will take about 3 years for our indebtedness to go down. He noted that raising property taxes will not make us an attractive place for industry to locate. He said we need to tighten up.

Commissioner Blackwell pointed out that there is \$300,000 in the County's litigation fund. If over the period of the next fiscal year, the County needs more than this, where will the money come from? Mr. Martin stated it would come from the General Fund.

Commissioner Baggett stated he felt the Board of Education would sue the County and inquired as to the process if that happens. The County Attorney said the process is as follows: (1) joint meeting between the two board; (2) mediation; and (3) if a compromise cannot be reached, the law suit would go to court. Commissioner Baggett asked what happens if the Court determines we have to give them more money. The County Attorney said the court would order a supplemental tax increase if the County has no money to pay.

Commissioner Henley inquired about the school's Fund Balance. Amy Cannon replied that she was told it would be between \$10-13 million. Commissioner Henley said he was told it could be as much as \$15.5 million.

Commissioner Henley said he was not prepared to make a decision about whether to spend the \$1.7 million available to the Board.

Commissioner Baggett inquired if the Board could tell the Sheriff how to spend his money. The answer is yes.

Commissioner Baggett inquired if the County could charge the municipalities for holding elections. The County Manager noted that we currently get reimbursed for direct costs. The Board discussed billing the municipalities for the indirect cost of the elections; however some members concluded the headache of doing this would far outweigh the benefits.

Commissioner King noted the many phone calls he is receiving concerning the cuts that are being made and they will affect county services. He also noted some concerns about employees with 15 years of service being cut while employees with two months are still on the payroll. The County Attorney noted the same factors should be used across the Board in determining who will be riffed and who will stay. He said it must be consistent. Commissioner King said he hoped this RIF is not being used as an excuse to terminate some employees.

Commissioner Baggett inquired about contracting out the Landscaping and Grounds Department. It was noted bids were received this week and they will be reviewed. It was noted some bids came in less than what it costs the County to provide this service. Staff will review the bids to make sure the bids are adequate to provide the service. If the county contracts for this service, 12 employees will lose their jobs. This contract would be for a three year period.

Commissioner King inquired how many employees will be subject to the RIF and how much would it take to put them back in the budget. It would take \$5.7 million to restore the full-time employees.

The Sheriff's Department will lose 55 employees. Commissioner Council inquired if those employees who are riffed will be notified of the new positions opening up in the Sheriff's Office (new jail). The County Manager noted our policy is to give those riffed employees an opportunity for first interview when there are vacancies for which they are qualified. However, he noted the Sheriff hire/fires his people, and is not necessarily required to abide by our policy. James Lawson, Personnel Supervisor, said his office would stay in close contact with the departments who have their own personnel division and share information with them about employees who may qualify for some new positions. James Martin, County Manager, noted it may not be easy to fill those jail positions because of the fact that a single jailer will be in the room with prisoners. The jailer would carry no weapon or have keys to get out of the room. Mr. Martin said many people would not feel comfortable in that situation.

In discussing the positions requested for the new jail, Commissioner Blackwell shared information with the Board about the number of employees the Florence, South Carolina, facility is using. They are similar in size to us and require fewer employees to run their jail. Commissioner Blackwell said he would be meeting with Dan Ford, Chief Jailer, tomorrow to receive information on why Cumberland County requires more jailers to staff the jail than does Florence.

Commissioner Jeannette Council asked the Board to excuse her from the rest of the meeting. The Board did excuse Commissioner Council.

Chairman Warren inquired if cuts in the Sheriff's Office would jeopardize the Accreditation. It was noted it would not.

The Board completed their review of the General Fund Budget. Commissioner Henley suggested that staff meet with school administration and encourage them to follow the example set by Fayetteville Technical Community College in using their Fund Balance to make up the difference between what the County gave them and what they need.

MEETING ADJOURNED: 8:35PM.