

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
January 6, 2020 - 7:00 PM
R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice Womack Building Columbus, NC
Columbus, NC
MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Yoder, Vice-Chairman Melton, Commissioner Beiler, Commissioner Gasperson, and Commissioner Moore. Also in attendance were County Manager Pittman, Attorney Berg, Clerk to the Board High, media and citizens.

1. Call to Order
2. Invocation - Commissioner Moore.
3. Pledge of Allegiance - Chairman Yoder.
4. Approval of Agenda
 - A. Vice-Chairman Melton moved to approve the agenda as written, seconded by Commissioner Gasperson and the motion carried unanimously.
5. Consent Agenda

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Commissioner Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

 - A. Tax refund requests through December 31, 2019 in the amount of \$8,503.54.
6. Citizen Comment(s)

There were no citizen comments.
7. Election Voting Machine Update.

Cliff Marr Elections Director presented the information on the new voting machines approved by the Board of Elections. He explained this is the same system he previously brought to the Board of Commissioners with the intent to purchase, and the funds were budgeted. Mr. Marr said he is now seeking final approval to acquire the new system approved by the State, ES&S Electronic Voting System (EVS) 5.2.2.0.

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to approve acquiring the new voting system from ES&S, EVS 5.2.2.0, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion

carried unanimously.

8. Broadband Engineering Study and Design.

Lindsey McGaha Sr. Business Support Specialist gave a presentation a copy of which is hereby incorporated by reference into these minutes. She explained the necessity for a Broadband Engineering Study to move forward with trying to improve internet service within Polk County. Commissioner Gasperson said broadband is no longer a want, but a need in today's society, and the engineering study is imperative for the future viability of broadband in rural Polk County.

Manager Pittman said one of the things that will come out of the study is to put a cost on what it would take to get internet access to the rural areas. He said the engineering assessment is necessary to have projects that are shovel ready to qualify to receive federal grants.

Manager Pittman said the County has had meetings with Riverstreet Networks, who have experience bringing broadband to rural communities in North Carolina, including Saluda in Polk County. Commissioner Gasperson said Riverstreet has a depth of experience with rural counties, and Commissioner Moore said he has spoken to a citizen in Saluda who is very happy with the service being provided by Riverstreet. Manager Pittman said once we sign an agreement to get the engineering study done, the data should be returned within 90 days. He said the typical cost for the study is around \$90,000 and the County will seek grants to help cover the cost, but the County may also have to supplement the project. Commissioner Gasperson said getting the engineering study done is essential, and once it is completed, the County will own the study and the data, and other service providers will be able to use it to hopefully bring new providers into the area and give current providers incentives to improve their networks.

9. Dogwood Trust Grant Application.

Lindsey McGaha Sr. Business Support Specialist presented information on a grant opportunity to partially fund the Broadband Engineering Study and Design Report. Manager Pittman said the engineering study is the first step and we will try to get as many grants as possible to help with the cost, and he will come back to another meeting with an exact number to do a budget amendment at that point to cover the difference.

The consensus of the Board was to apply for the Dogwood Trust Grant to partially fund the Broadband Engineering Study and Design Report, and to pursue any other grants available to help fund the report.

10. Cyber Security Assessment.

Bruce Yelton IT Director told the Board about an opportunity to have the North Carolina National Guard Cyber Assessment Team (NCAT) conduct an overarching security program review and technical analysis of Polk County's systems. He said it will show if we are following the best practices, and will point out any vulnerabilities within our network. He said an assessment like this would usually cost close to \$50,000, but the NCAT is providing the service to counties

free of charge. Mr. Yelton said he would report back to the Board with the findings from the review.

11. Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Manager Pittman said he and Commissioner Gasperson attended a session at the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Conference (NCACC) presented by Henderson County on the suicide rate among public safety staff and how that is directly correlated to early prevention and receiving counseling. He said it was a very powerful session, and he walked away thinking how can Polk County do better for all its employees. Polk County has never had anything like this before, but if the Board will agree to fund the endeavor, he would like to start an employee assistance program that will be available for all Polk County employees. He said he met with different vendors, and chose aspects from two different ones that will have the largest benefit to our employees with a minimal financial impact. The first one will provide counseling for a variety of issues such as, mental health, marital, financial, and legal. There is no limit to the number of incidents an employee can have each year, but each incident is limited to six sessions. If the incident requires more than six sessions, it is turned over to insurance at that point. The second provider is tele-doc which will give all employees access to a medical provider twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week without having to go to an office, or pay a copay. The Commissioners asked if other North Carolina counties provide this service, and Manager Pittman said yes, and some have enough employees that they fund and staff a full time department for employee wellness. He said this is a good starting point and there are more services the companies can provide if needed, such as on site counselors if a crisis occurs. He explained the amount needed to start the program now is \$9,000, and depending on usage, the amount may increase. Commissioner Moore asked the Sheriff if his department already has a program like this, and the Sheriff said no, but he is very supportive of this being offered.

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to approve the budget amendment for \$9,000 to fund the employee assistance program.

Discussion, Chairman Yoder said when he was a volunteer fire fighter there were a few incidents where he couldn't sleep and it would have been nice to call someone. Commissioner Gasperson said he was grateful to attend the workshop at the conference, and he would like to look into including fire fighters in the program. Manager Pittman said since firefighters are not technically County employees, he would have to look into if that is possible. Commissioner Beiler seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

12. Volunteer Board Application(s)

- A. Applications for Vote - Paul Marion Economic & Tourism Development Commission; John Perry McDowell, James Edward Shehan, and Steve Shehan Mill Spring Fire District Tax Commission.

Commissioner Moore moved to approve volunteer board applications as presented, seconded by Commissioner Beiler and the motion carried

unanimously.

13. Commissioner Comment(s)

The Commissioners thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and said they are looking forward to a productive and happy new year.

14. Adjournment

Commissioner Beiler moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion carried unanimously.

Attest:

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS

Ange High
Clerk to the Board

Myron Yoder
Chairman