

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
Regular Meeting  
December 16, 2019 - 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 - Chairman Yoder.
2. Invocation - Chairman Yoder.
3. Pledge of Allegiance - Commissioner Beiler.
4. Approval of Agenda
  - A. Vice-Chairman Melton moved to approve agenda as written, seconded by Commissioner Moore 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. Approve the November 18, 2019 public hearing and regular meeting minutes.
  - B. Approve the December 2, 2019 regular meeting minutes.
  - C. Declare two Recreation vehicles as surplus, details in packet.
  - D. Tax refund requests through November 30, 2019 in the amount of \$453.13.
6. Citizen Comment(s)

One citizen asked if the cupola project might receive funding from the National Historic Association, and if PANGEA would be bringing internet to residential neighborhoods. Another citizen thanked the Commissioners for hearing her comments from the last meeting and adding the broadband issue to tonight's meeting. Manager Pittman said he received an email from a Vice-President with Windstream and if there are other situations where individuals are refused service, he will share their information directly to Windstream.

7. Legislative Update.

State Representative Jake Johnson gave a presentation, a copy of which is hereby incorporated by reference into these minutes. He explained the North Carolina budget status, and what it could mean to Polk County. He stated his priorities going forward are to continue the responsible fiscal policy, and lower taxes to help create a friendly business environment. As well as increase access to broadband through multiple funding mechanisms, and focus on workforce development. Representative Johnson said he would come back with a detailed report after the short session.

8. Polk County 2019 Annual Financial Report.

Tonya Thompson of Gould Killian CPA Group, P.A. gave a presentation, a copy of which is hereby incorporated by reference into these minutes. Mrs. Thompson said the County received an unmodified, clean opinion, and the year ended with an increase in available fund balance. Ms. Thompson said the required state minimum fund balance is 8% or one month of expenses. She said the average county fund balance around the state is 30% with counties around the size of Polk being 34%. The report showed Polk County's fund balance as 36%.

9. School Budget Update.

Superintendent Aaron Greene came before the Polk County Board of Commissioners to request a one-time transfer of \$500,000 to help replenish available fund balance which he stated was at a critically low level. He thanked the Board of Commissioners for their significant and ongoing support. He explained the Polk County Schools fund balance is critically low. As of the most recent audit (2018-2019) there are \$550,000 in fund balance, \$250,000 of which are owed to the district by our own food service operations from accrued debt over the years. Mr. Greene said the school system needs to write off this debt at some point soon to have a true fund balance of \$300,000. He said many districts across North Carolina are in a similar situation since North Carolina is at pre-2007 levels of State education funding when adjusted for inflation. Mr. Greene said they work to maintain more than \$1,000,000 in fund balance to cover emergencies like capital repairs or sudden personnel changes, and to provide money up front when the State budget isn't approved. He explained managing the school system budget is not a straightforward endeavor, a big challenge is currently the State budget has not been approved, and will not be until at least mid-January, or maybe longer. He said another challenge is the State can require districts to return funds without warning, which happened last year when Polk County was required to return \$120,000 in revisions to the state on June 21, 2019 at the end of the fiscal year, and the only choice was to use fund balance. The district is still waiting for \$200,000 in medicaid reimbursement money that has yet to be issued for additional services provided to students. Mr. Greene said the school district has made reductions in personnel, and have made cuts in almost every department and area, such as staffing, athletics, pre-K, teacher and staff supplements, special education,

transportation, food service, and pay freezes for many non-teachers. He requested the Board of Commissioners provide a one-time infusion of monies in the amount of \$500,000 to be used to replenish the district's fund balance and to offset significant losses in food service, expenditures for capital safety improvements, expenditures for pre-K and special education, and emergency capital needs.

The Commissioners discussed with Mr. Greene the long term safety needs, as well as future improvement needs for the school system. Vice-Chairman Melton stated he would like the school system to have \$1,000,000 in their fund balance.

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to appropriate \$750,000 to the school system as a one time transfer.

The Commissioners discussed the amount requested was \$500,000, and the school board could come again to request more funds in the future if they feel it is necessary. Mr. Greene said he appreciated the offer for additional funding, but feels at this time the \$500,000 will be sufficient, and he will come back to the Board in the future if that changes.

Motion failed for lack of second.

Commissioner Gasperson moved to appropriate and approve a budget amendment for a one-time transfer of \$500,000 of fund balance to Polk County Schools for replenishment of their fund balance to offset significant losses in food service, expenditures for capital safety improvements, expenditures for pre-K and special education, and emergency capital needs, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion carried unanimously.

10. Comp. Time Discussion.

Manager Pittman said comp time accumulation has continued to grow for long term employees in certain departments. The departments having issues are the Sheriff, Jail, 911 Communications, Transportation, and Department of Social Services. Manager Pittman explained current employees are having to cover shifts and are accruing comp time while new employees are being recruited. He said paying out the comp time now, before the five percent employee raises begin in January 2020, will save the County \$7,000.

Commissioner Gasperson said if we pay for the comp time from fund balance now, the money in each departments budget for the unfilled positions should roll back into the general fund at the end of the fiscal year.

Commissioner Beiler moved to pay employee comp time balances earned as of December 8, 2019 in the amount of \$135,000, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion carried unanimously.

11. Election Voting Machine Update.

Cliff Marr Elections Director was unable to attend the meeting.

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to table the discussion, seconded by Commissioner Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

12. Transfer Station Floor Project.

Larry Walker Solid Waste Director presented the bids to repair the transfer station floor. He explained it needs to be completed in two separate projects, and both were budgeted.

Commissioner Moore moved to approve the Gibbs Welding bid in the amount of \$33,092.50 for repairing the metal apron at compactor chute, seconded by Commissioner Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to approve the Kel-Mor bid in the amount of \$42,32000 for the transfer station concrete floor, seconded by Commissioner Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

13. Courthouse Cupola Repair Project Update.

Manager Pittman presented the quotes to repair the cupola and explained this was the same project approved last year, but the contractor was unable to do the work, and new quotes were received to complete the project. He recommended awarding the bid to Midwest Maintenance Inc. (MMI) in the amount of \$32,000. He said although this price is slightly higher than the other bid received, MMI has done work on the Courthouse in the past and is familiar with the project.

Commissioner Beiler moved to approve the MMI bid in the amount of \$32,000 to repair the Courthouse cupola, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Gasperson moved to transfer \$11,726 that was reserved in the prior year in Capital Reserve and transfer up to \$20,274 from contingency for the remaining amount needed to repair the cupola on the courthouse, seconded by Commissioner Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

14. Wireless Internet Project Update.

Ron Walters and Ned Kiser, representing PANGEA, both gave presentations, a copy of which is hereby incorporated by reference into these minutes.

Mr. Walters explained PANGEA is a public/private partnership that has been working in Polk and Rutherford counties for several years. He said they are working on attracting internet providers to use the infrastructure in place to get rural broadband to the people. He said the feasibility assessment is needed to see how to best use and deploy service to the unserved and underserved residents in Polk County.

Mr. Kiser said he is working on the Rural Broadband Feasibility Assessment (RBFA)

in Polk & Rutherford Counties. He read the Mission Statement:

*In order to expand educational & economic opportunity throughout the two Counties, the RBFA exists as a public/private partnership among Polk County, Rutherford County, PANGAEA to stimulate, catalyze, facilitate, and as needed provide residential broadband Internet service accessible to*

*significantly more households throughout Polk & Rutherford Counties.*

He said the main goals are to close the homework gap for students, attract technology based remote workers, catalyze development of new technology based business ventures, attract and retain businesses especially technology based businesses, and increase real estate values via demand for technology connected homes.

He said they are trying to leverage networks already in place to reach more residents, but the two main challenges are topography and foliage that impede radio signals.

The Board discussed some of the challenges and the propagation of coverage being dictated by what is physically around where the signal is coming from.

Manager Pittman said tower heights impact coverage not only for broadband, but also for digital public safety radio networks. He suggested having the Planning Board review the Wireless Telecommunication Ordinance in regard to height, public safety and collocation issues.

15. Broadband Discussion.

Commissioner Gasperson requested this item be placed on the agenda, and read this statement. Ten years ago, we entered a new decade with the mandate set forth in the County's newly adopted 20/20 plan, which summarized in the "Vision for Polk County" statement: *"Polk County's rural atmosphere and serene natural beauty will be vigorously protected. Visionary and pragmatic county and municipal governments will work together in a cooperative manner as they continue to enhance the quality of life for all Polk County citizens."* Tonight as we move forward into the next decade, I propose that we have an expanded visioning mandate that would include the goal that: *"Visionary and pragmatic county and municipal governments will work together in a cooperative manner as they strive to help facilitate high speed broadband connection to all homes and businesses in Polk County."* Perhaps this could be called "Polk County's 20/30 Plan.

The Board discussed the broadband challenges for the next decade, and how essential connectivity has become for all public purposes.

Commissioner Gasperson moved for the County Manager and the Planning Board to work together reviewing the Wireless Telecommunication (Tower) Ordinance, specifically in regard to height, public safety, and collocation, seconded by Vice-Chairman Melton and the motion carried unanimously.

16. Volunteer Board Application(s)

A. The Commissioners reviewed the following applications - Paul Marion Economic & Tourism Development Commission; John Perry McDowell, James Edward Shehan, and Steve Shehan Mill Spring Fire District Tax Commission.

17. Commissioner Comment(s)

The Commissioners wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. They expressed their eagerness to get a lot done in the upcoming year.

Commissioner Moore wished a special Happy Birthday to a life long Polk County resident Addie Lee Lynch on her 101 birthday.

18. Closed Session

- A. Commissioner Moore moved to go into closed session for the purpose of attorney client privilege, and property acquisition, seconded by Commissioner Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

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

- B. Commissioner Moore moved to return to open session, seconded by Commissioner Beiler, and the motion carried unanimously.

19. Adjournment

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

Attest:

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF  
COMMISSIONERS

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Ange High  
Clerk to the Board

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Myron Yoder  
Chairman