

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
April 20, 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 - Chairman Yoder.

Chairman Yoder stated Commissioner Moore and Attorney Berg, as well as media and citizens are participating in the meeting remotely. He reminded everyone to keep their microphone muted unless speaking, and when making a vote to verbally state their vote for those listening.

2. Invocation - Commissioner Beiler.

3. Pledge of Allegiance - Commissioner Gasperson.

4. Approval of Agenda

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

5. Consent Agenda

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

A. March 16, 2020 regular meeting minutes.

B. Tax refund requests through March 30, 2020 in the amount of \$226.85.

C. Proclamation Declaring April 2020 Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Month.

D. Schedule a public hearing on Monday, May 18, 2020 at 7:00 pm in the R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice to hear citizen comments on the Board of Commissioners of the County of Polk, North Carolina with respect to not to exceed \$60,000,000 public finance authority (ACTS Retirement Life Communities, Inc. obligated group), Series 2020 bonds.

E. Animal Control Ordinance amendments to clarify the responsibilities of the Animal Control Appeal Board, and minor clerical changes within the document.

- F. Budget Amendment to appropriate revaluation fund balance due to the timing of work performed by the contractor and in-house; the contract price did not change.
 - G. Budget Amendment to transfer the project that was budgeted in the General Fund to the Capital Fund to allow project completion after June 30, 2020, and to approve the Project Ordinance for County-wide Communication recording system replacement/FCC licenses/radio equipment replacements.
 - H. Budget Addition to increase revenue and expense for proceeds from the sale of Hwy. 108 right of way to NCDOT. The funds will be transferred to the Capital Reserve fund for road improvements to Wolverine Trail in the near future.
6. Citizen Comment(s) - Citizens may submit their comments to the Clerk to the Board by email - ahigh@polknc.org, or phone - 828-894-3301 ext. 221, by 5:00 pm April 20, 2020 to be read during the meeting.

Chairman Yoder said the meeting was advertised, and citizens were given the option to email or call the Clerk to the Board with their comments. The Clerk read the one citizen comment she received thanking the Commissioners and County staff for their proactive leadership, and asked about the availability of COVID-19 and antibody testing.

Commissioner Gasperson read a comment he received from a citizen concerned about short term rentals going back to normal on May 1st. She requested delaying the opening another month.

7. Budget discussion for no tax increase in the 2020/2021 budget year.

Commissioner Gasperson asked for this item to be added to the agenda, and he began the discussion by reading this statement. "I know that the County Manager has an extremely difficult job as he works to present a balanced budget proposal for the 2020-21 Polk County fiscal budget year, which will start ten weeks from now on July 1, 2020. Considering the negative financial impact imposed on the taxpayers of Polk County as a result of the COVID-19 virus, I'm directing County Manager Pittman to present a balanced budget that does not include any property tax increase, and that we also see no tax increase requests from any of our fire districts. So, let me be perfectly clear: I'm committed that there will be no possibility of any fire district tax increases from any of our fire districts for this upcoming fiscal year. I hope that the other Commissioners also support the "no tax increase" position that I am advocating."

Vice-Chairman Melton said the no tax increase was discussed and agreed upon last year after they raised the tax rate for FY 2019/20. Commissioner Gasperson agreed, he said he wanted to include that no fire or special district rates would be increased.

Commissioner Moore said he was not on the Board last year when this was discussed, however, he supports the no tax increase. He suggested considering a tax decrease for the citizens.

Commissioner Beiler said he appreciated Commissioner Gasperson adding this to the agenda, and he supports the no tax increase. He said this upcoming year will be interesting, and he hesitates decreasing the tax rate with the uncertainty of how sales tax revenues will be impacted.

Chairman Yoder said the County has a healthy fund balance to help in times such as these, and he anticipates there might be the need to use it for shortfalls if they arise. He said a decrease is a good thought, but he's not sure it can be done this year, and may be something to consider down the road.

Manager Pittman said the things we are talking about encountering in this upcoming year is the reason why the County has a fund balance. He said the budget he is planning on submitting already includes holding the line by all departments, and tax rate cuts of the magnitude of three cents would have to include personnel. He said each penny of decrease is approximately three hundred thousand dollars, which would mean almost a million dollars would need to be cut from services to accommodate a three penny tax rate decrease. Commissioner Moore said he was not set on a number, he just wanted it considered.

Manager Pittman said we already anticipate spending six hundred thousand dollars from fund balance for one time costs, such as capital projects. Commissioner Gasperson said a tax decrease is great in theory, but it would lead to employee layoffs and decreased services.

Manager Pittman agreed with Commissioner Gasperson's statement. Commissioner Gasperson said if the sales tax revenue doesn't come in as estimated, and the County goes to fund balance to cover the shortfall, it would take a long time to build it back up. Manager Pittman said the current fund balance would cover three months of County operating expenses. Commissioner Moore asked how much fund balance is required. Manager Pittman said 34% is average for a community our size.

8. Polk County COVID-19 Update.

Joshua Kennedy Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) Director talked about the current status, current outcomes, and how to begin moving forward. He gave a presentation, a copy of which is hereby incorporated by reference into these minutes. Mr. Kennedy said enhanced testing options will start next week for community members. He said the key is increased testing. Starting Thursday, April 23rd a drive-thru testing site will be set up at 40 Ward St. in Columbus, NC. He said in order to move into the new norm for the next several months, communities across the U.S. will need to have increased access to testing. Enhanced testing helps public health to quickly identify those who have COVID-19 and isolate individuals sooner, so we can slow the spread until there

is a vaccine and a safe/effective treatment. Testing and increased prevention efforts such as face masks, daily temperature checks and social distancing efforts will still be needed to keep the COVID-19 case counts low.

Commissioner Moore asked about the drive-thru testing site. Mr. Kennedy said it will be each Thursday, citizens will make appointments, and will drive-thru behind the old Polk County jail located at 40 Ward St. in Columbus.

Commissioner Beiler asked if they would be doing the antibody testing, and a time frame for results. Mr. Kennedy said they will not be doing the antibody test at this time, and the test results should be in between two to seven days.

Commissioner Gasperson asked if Mr. Kennedy thought he would extend the short term rental recommendation of no rentals through the end of April. Mr. Kennedy said they will have to look at all the numbers across the county and region before making the decision.

Commissioner Gasperson asked about the difference in the numbers between Rutherford and Polk counties. Mr. Kennedy said density plays a major part in the difference, and it's hard to compare.

Chairman Yoder complimented the local citizens who run short term rentals who voluntarily distanced themselves and did not rent during this time. He said he believes hotels are a greater risk, and should have been included in the executive order. He also complimented the citizens who are complying with the stay at home order.

Bobby Arledge, Emergency Management Director said the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) is open Monday through Friday 8:30 am to 5:00pm. He said he is having daily communications with community stakeholders, and has been working to acquire Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for agencies. He said 911 Communications are asking medical questions on all calls in an effort to protect our public safety officers. He said local retail stores and restaurants have been adhering to all the rules and regulations. He said Nixle alerts with the current positive case counts, and any other important information are being sent out Monday through Friday to anyone who has signed up to receive the messages. He said to sign up for Nixle alerts, text COVID19PC to 888-777.

Manager Pittman said Mr. Arledge, Mr. Kennedy, and the County Maintenance Department will start looking at County offices to assess the needs of each department in preparation to safely re-open offices to the public. He said the goal is to have all the basic protective measures in place by May 4, 2020.

Commissioner Moore asked if this would include the Tax and Tag office. Manager Pittman said yes, there will be a protective divider installed between employees and citizens, and PPE will be available for all employees.

Lindsey McGaha, Sr. Business Specialist said she has contacted 273 businesses by phone, email, or mail, not including tourism or agricultural related businesses that other staff have been contacting. She said the most common problem businesses are having is filing for unemployment and the paycheck protection funding. Her main focus has been getting businesses in touch with

the right entities to help them with their questions, and applications. She said she has also been working closely with Isothermal Planning and Development Commission, and encourages everyone to go to the Economic Development page on the County website for links to helpful resources.

Manager Pittman said the schools have been doing a tremendous job feeding the community. He said it has evolved into much more than just giving a school lunch, it has been helping entire families. He asked the Board to consider allowing the schools to continue using the funds appropriated to the after school program for this purpose, since that program is no longer necessary. The consensus of the board was to allow the school board to determine the best use of the funds originally appropriated for the after school program.

9. Approval for FY 2020 Audit Contract.

Sandra Hughes, Finance Director reminded the Board that last year when she went out for proposals, she requested a three-year audit proposal, and Gould Killian was awarded the contract based on first year with the option of continuing for the next two years. Their estimated cost was \$65,375, the actual FY 2020 contract amount is \$65,825, a difference of \$450, and Ms. Hughes recommends approving the FY 2020 Gould Killian audit contract.

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to approve the Gould Killian audit contract for FY 2020 in the amount of \$65,825.00, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion carried unanimously.

10. Ambulance Purchase.

Michael Crater, EMS Director presented the bids to purchase a low mileage display model ambulance, similar to what they purchased in the past. He said the County will save money if they purchase it now, rather than adding it to next year's budget.

Vice-Chairman Melton moved to accept the bid from Select Custom Apparatus Inc. for \$115,000, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Moore moved to approve the budget amendment of \$115,000 to purchase an ambulance at a reduced cost this fiscal year, seconded by Vice-Chairman Melton and the motion carried unanimously.

11. Volunteer Board Applications for Vote.

A. Vice-Chairman Melton moved to appoint T. Craig Hilton to the Workforce Development Board - Region C, seconded by Commissioner Moore and the motion carried unanimously..

12. Commissioner Comment(s)

Commissioner Gasperson said there is some confusion about whether local

officials can override the State Order from the Governor. He wants everyone to understand the Board of Commissioners does not have that power. He said the Board of Commissioners can make more restrictive regulations, but they cannot make them less restrictive. He also wished Vice-Chairman Melton a happy birthday tomorrow.

Vice-Chairman Melton thanked everyone for getting the meeting together, and is glad they were able to honor the citizens by having at least one meeting a month, and he thanked the citizens who were listening.

Commissioner Beiler thanked everyone for getting the meeting together. He said April 7, 2020 the community lost a very special person, James "Tank" Waters, Tryon Fire Chief. He said he was a huge asset to the community, and is a reminder to live each day to it's fullest. He said there is a lot of planning going on to start getting the County back to normal, and encouraged everyone to be wise, and don't give in to fear.

Commissioner Moore thanked everyone for getting the meeting together. He thanked the doctors, nurses, first responders, and County staff for the fantastic job they are doing for the citizens. He quoted Mr. Aaron Greene "Better days are ahead Polk County."

Chairman Yoder said citizens are having a large part in preventing the spread of COVID-19. He said people are aware of how to protect themselves, and as Chairman, he is always on the side of the citizens. He knows we are in good hands with the County staff, and that they have hard decisions to make. He said in spite of our different opinions, we are stronger together, and the more we work together the quicker we'll get back to normal. He thanked everyone for participating in the meeting.

13. Adjournment

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

Attest:

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS

Ange High
Clerk to the Board

Myron Yoder
Chairman