

POLK COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS'
BUDGET WORK SESSION
Tuesday, May 15, 2012 at 7:00pm
R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice, Womack Building
Columbus, NC
MINUTES

PRESENT: Chair Gasperson, Vice-Chair McDermott, Commissioner Owens, Commissioner Pack and Commissioner Walker. Also in attendance were County Manager Whitson, Administrative Assistant Dianne Timberlake, staff, and citizens.

1. Call to Order – Chair Gasperson called the meeting to order.
2. Invocation – Chair Gasperson gave the invocation.
3. Pledge of Allegiance – Paul Sutherland was invited by Commissioner Owens to lead the pledge.
4. Budgets for Review

The County Manager reported having heard from Harmon Field and the Tryon Fire Departments that their budgets remain unchanged.

5. Rescue Squad - Mr. Robbie Price, Captain of the Rescue Squad, presented a letter to Commissioners requesting an increase from $\frac{1}{4}$ of a cent to $\frac{1}{3}$ of a cent. Mr. Price and the Rescue Squad's Treasurer, Bob Edwards, discussed increased costs that contribute to the request. These include rising fuel prices, maintenance and repair of ambulances, a rescue truck and pontoon boat, and replacement of defibrillators. They requested that the budget be restored to the 2008 balance of \$96,994. The change represents an increase of \$23,558 above the current year, which is 37% of 2013 property tax estimates, or \$87,548.
6. Green Creek, Saluda, and Sunny View Fire Departments requested no changes to their budgets.
7. Columbus Fire Department – Mr. Bobby Arledge, Columbus Fire Chief, presented a request for a 1 cent tax increase to fund staffing for an additional three full-time employees. The impact will be \$10 on every \$100K property value. Mr. Arledge presented the following justification for the increase and noted that an audit was conducted. The fire department responds to a large volume of calls annually, of which 17 percent in 2011 were mutual aid to other departments. Therefore, the change will benefit all the towns. No increase has been requested in over 10 years. They have lowered the insurance rating in the city limits from 7 to 5, which saves homeowners 17% on insurance costs. Their goal is to get it down to 7 within the County. They plan to build a new sub-station at no cost to taxpayers in 2012,

which will help reduce the rating for homeowners furthest from the Columbus fire station.

Mr. Jonathan Kanipe, Town Manager, was present and confirmed Columbus Town Council's unanimous approval of the increase. Currently, the Town offers 4 cents per \$100 valuation toward the Fire Department. If there is a change, the Town's contribution will go up to 5 cents per \$100 valuation.

Commissioner Owens noted that he received calls complimenting Columbus Fire Department, but wondered about the impact on volunteers. Mr. Arledge stated that the full-time staff would allow volunteers more uninterrupted time with their families, and positively affect the response time to emergencies. The increase in their budget would be approximately 20%, or about \$63K. In the coming year, Columbus expects to lose money because of property tax decreases from a few commercial properties that have converted to non-profit status. Without the increase they will lose roughly \$3K.

8. Mill Spring – Fire Chief Trent Carswell and Treasurer Charles Green presented a request for a 1 cent increase based on several factors. This includes addressing inadequate water volume on Silver Creek Rd. because of limited tank capacity, an issue identified through a needs assessment. Other factors are fuel costs and those related to fighting ethanol fires, which mandate a special type of foam on each truck at \$840 per truck, per ethanol fire. With the increase they will be able to purchase a new engine and a tanker to replace the 1976 model currently on hand. They will also be able to cover the increased call volume affecting mutual aid with most departments in Polk County, and two in Rutherford County. They expect to reduce the insurance rating from 9 to 7 in that district. Since 2007, they have received approximately \$900,000 through FEMA. However, the grants require matching funds which are taken from their operating budget. The proposed increase will adjust their budget up by \$29,000.
9. Adjournment – Commissioner Walker moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Owens and the motion carried unanimously.

ATTEST:

POLK COUNTY BOARD
OF COMMISSIONERS

Dianne Timberlake
Administrative Assistant
to the County Manager

Ray Gasperson
Chair