

The Alleghany County Board of Commissioners held a planning session on Tuesday, January 29, 2013, at 6:30pm in the Board Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, 348 South Main Street, Sparta, North Carolina.

Present: Chairman Larry Cox, Vice-Chair Tom Smith, Commissioner Larry Davis, Commissioner Karen Leys, County Manager Don Adams and Clerk to the Board Karen Evans. Commissioner John Goudreau and County Attorney Donna Shumate were absent.

Chair Cox called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. He explained the purpose of the meeting is to have a planning session including the format and deciding on a few goals to try to accomplish this year. He talked about the legislative goals conference. He passed out copies of the goals. He said this will be on another meeting agenda for further conversations. He reviewed Alleghany County's goals and the results of each goal being included. He talked about the equity formula goal and how it was voted on in favorably.

Commissioner Smith talked about his impression of this meeting comparable to a meeting the Board previously held at the BDC that focused on economic development, which is where he spent most of this time.

Commissioner Smith and Chair Cox talked about how tonight is for conversation and no actions will be taken.

Commissioner Smith talked about things that he has thought about for this meeting. He said that he thought at one time there was an economic development plan and he wondered if that plan needed to be looked at.

County Manager Don Adams stated there are three possible plans that Commissioner Smith could be referring to; CEDS, Town of Sparta went through a community planning process which included the county, plan done by Angelou Economics. He explained each of the plans.

Commissioner Smith talked about a plan by Mr. Hunter. He said he started out with that information and looking at the resources/assets. He further said that he thought reviewing those plans and updating them might create a goal from tonight.

County Manager Don Adams asked the Board if they wanted copies of these plans.

Commissioner Leys stated she wouldn't like just a copy; she would like a description/oral presentation.

County Manager Don Adams talked about how to proceed with that request for the first two plans he mentioned but he doesn't know about the Angelou plan because it is so old.

Commissioner Davis asked about doing this at the joint meeting.

County Manager Don Adams said he will talk to the Town Manager about making the presentations at the joint meeting.

Commissioner Leys said she didn't know how this meeting would work. She said that she would like for people to come in to tell us their dreams, focus on economic development, have some community members and work hard on that. She said she was reading NCACC newspaper about educational opportunities. She talked about inviting the Governor and the NC Chamber of Commerce here to see what they could help us with. She further talked about education and economic development can only take you as far as people are educated. She explained her conversations with Jayne Boger about educating and retaining people. She talked about her excitement over activities happening with agriculture. She further talked about accomplishing things with committees. She explained at the recent legislative goals conference she learned that Alleghany County is very fortunate more so than a lot of counties. She said we can do good things. She explained that she would like to see committees of different people. She further explained that she would like to spend a day or half of a day with County employees to learn more about Alleghany County.

Chair Cox talked about there is a lot to learn.

Commissioner Leys said she agrees and the only way to learn is to be there. She talked about getting with David Evans before he leaves to see what dreams he has that the Board hasn't heard.

Commissioner Davis said that he is already thinking about budget. He talked about the department heads looking at their budgets to see where they can do cuts in their budget to save money.

Chair Cox talked about the County Manager meets with the departments in the budget process.

County Manager Don Adams talked about we did generate a list of ideas from the departments where potential monies could be saved.

Commissioner Leys asked if there is a group meeting with the department heads.

County Manager Don Adams stated he has a department head meeting about four times a year and why he doesn't have the meetings more often. He explained that some departments interrelate to others and some don't. He talked about topics that affect all departments. He provided examples.

Commissioner Leys asked about having a cash prize for the best idea.

County Manager Don Adams said he looked at that a few years but there have to be rules placed on it. He described the concept.

Commissioner Leys asked if there has ever been a suggestion box.

County Manager Don Adams said no.

Chair Cox summarized Commissioner Davis' comments regarding budget suggestions from the department heads to be more efficient.

County Manager Don Adams talked about the list from the previous conversations a few years ago. He further talked about there were some good ideas from that.

Commissioner Smith talked about the Tourism Development Authority, merchants association, Chamber of Commerce and Sparta Revitalization Committee and asked if these groups work together.

Commissioner Leys stated it would be nice if they would present information to the Board with their good news. She talked about these groups needing more social media.

Commissioner Smith talked about how Avery County has a 9.5% increase in tourism. He further talked about Avery County has a summit planned on February 26 to learn how to build tourism.

Chair Cox talked about the Veterans Memorial Park, fishing and biking. He explained that he attended the Council of Government's regional bike plan meeting where they worked on it for a year, and it is getting close to finishing. He talked about a bike plan for Alleghany County. He further talked about outdoor recreation including biking, bike trails, bike plan, and delayed harvest streams. He talked about the stocking of the stream in the Park, having a group to develop a bike plan, Sam Brown mountain, fairgrounds, beginning of the delayed harvest program. He said people will come and spend money. He further said that he hopes to get the Commissioners support, not just spending money. He stated that he feels like there is community support.

County Manager Don Adams talked about creating the bike plan and different things needed for the maps.

Chair Cox talked about they are waiting to make sure everyone is getting on board with the concept.

County Manager Don Adams said it is in the middle because we aren't waiting on them and they aren't waiting on us. He talked about putting work into generating the maps.

Chair Cox talked about this can help.

Commissioner Leys, Chair Cox and County Manager Don Adams talked about the delayed harvest program and the months that are catch/release months and the months that the fish can be kept. Commissioner Smith talked about the economic impact of fishing

Commissioner Smith talked about the trails at Sam Brown and at the fairgrounds.

Chair Cox talked about the possibility of getting the blessing to proceed forward.

Commissioner Smith said there is a lot of potential.

Commissioner Leys talked about getting a retired wildlife officer to help.

Chair Cox talked about the need to reinstate the budget cuts for mental health. He talked about the needs of Alleghany County.

Chair Cox talked about the need to look at employees' compensation, and Allegheny County has some of the lowest paid employees in the State but have some of the hardest workers.

Commissioner Smith talked about the School of Government's website has the salaries of all 100 counties and how Allegheny County ranks 95-100. He said he would like to look at that.

Commissioner Leys talked about how the County has had some employees leaving because of that.

Commissioner Smith said there are lots of ways to go about that.

County Manager Don Adams talked about employee morale is down, would welcome this conversation and the need to look at the whole picture that is drawing morale down. He said he is all for saving money and used examples but those types of savings do not come close to pay for this type of thing. He reiterated that the morale road is insurance and salaries which cannot be paid for by tweaking other places. He said that if the Board goes down this road be prepared for large numbers. He talked about if the Board starts it; don't take it away because that would be an additional significant morale issue.

Commissioner Smith and County Manager Don Adams talked getting ready to start looking at renewals in late February or early March. The County Manager explained that he is going to ask the insurance consultant to come present to the Board publicly.

Commissioner Leys talked about being proud of the Veterans Park and in this month's NCACC County Lines was an article about receiving money for the Park. She further talked about one thing she discussed with the County Manager was improving internet access. She stated the need for discussion and presentation for the town or wherever business could take advantage of it. She said there is a lot of room for improvement. The County Manager said he can invite Skyline as a public information topic. She talked about some businesses in town uses another internet provider. The County Manager talked about he can ask them to come here and talk about it but it depends upon what type of business you are trying to recruit. He said he will talk to Skyline about coming.

Commissioner Davis talked about how he would like to see more use out of the fairgrounds since we have a good facility.

Commissioner Leys said she would like to see more horse shows.

Chair Cox asked Commissioner Smith if the fairgrounds are looking to expand events. Commissioner Smith explained they would like to have more events, one lawn mower race entity folded, would be nice if the fair came back, having opportunities with some things we have, a lot of work for the fire departments to put on the mudsling.

Commissioner Davis talked about an idea of having a flea market at fairgrounds where spots would get sold.

Commissioner Smith talked about the facilities that we have including lots of things at the schools. He further talked about the Farmers Market will be located in the same place as this past year.

Chair Cox asked about funneling these now and not sure how to do this plus he isn't comfortable without Commissioner Goudreau.

Commissioner Smith and Commissioner Davis said they want to wait on Commissioner Goudreau.

County Manager Don Adams summarized his notes in categories. He talked about forming a planning process. He continued reviewing his notes. He said he will go back and group these things together. He talked about the next steps if the Board wants to proceed.

Commissioner Leys said she would like to have measures on the goals that the Board wants to attain.

County Manager Don Adams explained that he is coming up on the budget process time. He reviewed the current process. He read the draft memo with the proposed dates. He reviewed the process in the past.

Chair Cox said he was pretty comfortable with the timeline.

Commissioner Leys and County Manager Don Adams talked about when departments work on the budget. He explained mid-May there are a lot of people paying their taxes and the County receives the last quarter of sales tax.

County Manager Don Adams said he is open to ideas to change the budget process.

County Manager Don Adams talked about the Board of Education joint meeting regarding facility discussions. He said he is putting it on Monday's agenda.

Commissioner Leys said she would like to meet with Wilkes Community College, also.

County Manager Don Adams talked about how that ties into the budget process conversation.

Commissioner Leys continued talking about hearing from WCC.

County Manager Don Adams asked if she is talking about budget or another conversation.

Chair Cox talked about they come at budget time.

County Manager Don Adams talked about getting annual reports from every department.

Commissioner Leys said that she would like a part of each agenda be for them to come and tell us what they've been working on and any goals they have been dreaming of.

Chair Cox talked about making that part of their regular annual report. Commissioner Leys stated that is what they have done and she wants to hear what their ideas are.

Commissioner Smith reiterated this is a request from the Board of Education. The County Manager said yes to tour the High School, and he talked about things that have been accomplished plus going to look at the future.

County Manager Don Adams talked about the envisioning process for economic development then another process of visioning with the department heads and elected officials. He talked about ways to proceed with these ideas.

Commissioner Leys talked about inviting Skyline, Bremco, Wilkes Community College, Dr. Cox and business people in the community.

County Manager Don Adams talked about asking Skyline and Bremco but it is different than the departments. He used examples of Board of Education and the Recreation Department. He said he has to separate the citizens' part from the department part.

Chair Cox said lets think about this and get back together.

Being no further business, Commissioner Leys made a motion to adjourn at 8:15pm. Commissioner Davis seconded the motion. Vote 4:0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Evans  
Clerk to the Board

Attest:

Larry Cox  
Chairman