

The Alleghany County Board of Commissioners held a special session on Thursday, March 31, 2011, at 9:00am in the Conference Room of the Blue Ridge Business Development Center, 115 Atwood Street, Sparta, North Carolina. The purpose of this session was to hold a retreat.

Present: Chairman Ken Richardson, Vice-Chair Tom Smith, Commissioner Larry Cox, Commissioner John Goudreau, Commissioner Steve Roten, County Manager Don Adams, and Clerk to the Board Karen Evans.

Chair Richardson opened the meeting at 9:00am.

County Manager Don Adams reviewed budget charts and explanation sheets for the adopted budget as of July 1, 2010. He further reviewed the sheets of retreat topics from the Commissioners. He said that the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) is requesting goals and priorities to be presented from the Board at the district meeting in Wilkesboro.

Commissioner Cox talked about information that he had brought for discussions including per-student costs in Alleghany and Ashe counties and a comparison about Alleghany versus other counties' health.

County Manager Don Adams reviewed the chart from the previous meeting about economic development and how the chart relates to the budget. He provided an example.

The Board of Commissioners talked about the status of the occupancy tax bill before the General Assembly, providing the monies to the Chamber and as a group the Board should decide where the monies goes.

Commissioner Goudreau talked about requests that will be coming to the County soon; Memorial Day parade, fireworks being reinstated, Summer Jamboree.

The County Manager explained that the Blue Ridge Business Development Center (BDC) is looking to take a greater leadership role in economic development and his conversations with Clark Hunter. He talked about the funding of the Chamber currently and State law states that the occupancy tax money will be sent to the Chamber.

Chair Richardson stated that it is no more Chamber money than it is County Commissioners' money because it is generated by tourism and people coming to Alleghany County. He talked about money spent regarding economic development will generate more money. He further talked about economic development and education are on equal playing fields.

County Manager Don Adams explained the planning process for economic development regarding the Chamber and the BDC.

Chair Richardson explained that the BDC helps small businesses and larger companies go to the County Manager.

The County Manager explained what the BDC does and economic development conversations can get more detailed in the budget session. He asked about which way to proceed regarding education; curriculum or outside drivers of curriculum of influences. He provided examples of how the County participates in the outside drivers. He discussed the NCACC district meeting questionnaire for the meeting next week and reviewed the questions they are asking; number one concern about the State budget, talked to any legislators about it, number one non-budget related legislative issues and talked to any legislators about it. He explained some State-budget concerns that he is aware of includes the Governor's budget of the schools' workers compensation costs, counties to fund school bus purchases, DPI has recommended reducing small supplemental funding by 25%, lottery allocation being cut from 40% to 10%, and these are budget drivers that the Commissioners can't change in the amount of \$891,000.

The Board of Commissioners and the County Manager discussed the school bus replacement cycle, cuts from the State, \$375,000 small schools funding cut is directly translated to cut positions, ADM funds for construction projects, having a better idea at the budget workshop about the State budget, ideas about the budget impact because NCACC will take them back to the General Assembly, budget coming from Raleigh will change, housing of people convicted of misdemeanors and the impact to the Jail including the possibilities of losing the Federal inmates and housing of female inmates.

Commissioner Roten stated that it all comes back to money and he doesn't see how the County can offset what is going to happen.

Commissioner Cox talked about the potential cuts to Partnership for Children, Smart Start and the More at Four programs along with the impacts to these programs.

The Board of Commissioners and County Manager Don Adams talked about the number one State budget issue is education cuts, the possibilities of counties having to maintain roads, if the sales tax sunsets--the money will have to be found elsewhere, Commissioners get involved in funding School capital needs not curriculum, \$891,000 education shortfall equals a 0.07 tax increase, Smart Start, how the More at Four program and Smart Start cuts could impact economic development, spending per child in Alleghany and Ashe counties, school districts and charter/private/home schools.

The County Manager talked to the Board about the current status of the Veterans Memorial Park.

The Board of Commissioners and the County Manager talked about the Park and possible ways to keep the Park on schedule including additional ways to raise monies, such as, selling vacant property. They discussed PARTF will not extend the contract, corporate sponsors with naming rights and as of now being supportive of the project as long as no County money is involved.

Chair Richardson stated that he has been approached about the fireworks for July 4.

The Board and the County Manager talked about the fireworks bring a lot of people into Sparta, timeline, the County Manager not signing the contract at this point because there is no County money involved, need to move forward or not, having to find places to cut the budget and getting more back in economic development by supporting the fireworks.

Commissioner Roten and Commissioner Goudreau stated that they are not voting for a tax increase.

County Manager Don Adams explained that the Board has voted to not fund the fireworks and until this Board votes to fund the fireworks he isn't comfortable moving forward. He said his request is to bring it up at a meeting and vote on it then move forward.

Chair Richardson mentioned the Fire Commission and a possible fire tax. He talked about the current amount of money spent on fire departments. He further talked about how the fire tax could be collected and sent to each department. He talked about how it is addressed in other counties. He asked is this something worth pursuing.

Commissioner Roten stated that the last Fire Commission meeting was cancelled and rescheduled to April 8 at the Sparta fire department.

Chair Richardson stated that it would be 2012 before any of the money would be realized.

Commissioner Roten, Chair Richardson and the County Manager talked about the issue must be put on the ballot for the people to decide.

Chair Richardson stated that it must have the fire departments' support. He talked about Gerald Leftwich is coming to a Commissioners' meeting soon to present six-mile fire districts in order to assist people with their property insurance rates.

The Board of Commissioners and the County Manager discussed how the fire tax would work including who sets the rates and the process they have to go through. Commissioner Roten and Chair Richardson talked about discussing it at the next Fire Commission meeting.

Chair Richardson talked about the farmers market will probably be looking to the County to be supportive of their efforts more than offering a parking lot. The Board talked about different ideas for the farmers market. They further talked about the Commissioners need to be aware of the efforts and do what the Board can to be supportive.

The Board talked about tomorrow's meeting at the Upper Mountain Research Station and the importance of the meeting.

Chair Richardson asked the Board to look over the list of Education and Other. He further asked is there enough to talk about for another retreat or does the Board want to continue today.

County Manager Don Adams talked about one topic for the future is safety needs which could drive the fire tax plus animal control will have to evolve into other counties' models. He explained the costs will be higher. He talked about the actual functions of the fire departments/first responders and the rescue squad is still looking for their contract to be updated. He said that these conversations are coming along with conversations about how services are provided for fire, rescue, EMS services, and it could costs money.

The Board talked about the surrounding areas and whether they have paid staff or not. The County Manager explained that a lot of fire departments are going fire/rescue and reviewed the pros and cons.

The Board and the County Manager talked about the recent Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) meeting in Wilkesboro, completion of the bypass would relocate the local DOT and the State is putting more emphasis on the RPOs.

The Board discussed dates and times for a budget retreat and decided on Friday, April 29, at 9:00am in the Board Meeting Room of the County Administration Building.

County Manager Don Adams reviewed topics for the budget retreat; taxation, debt and general budget discussions. He stated that the Board will later hold meetings to discuss the actual budget. He explained that the budget retreat will be combination of being general in scope and a detailed educational section regarding the current budget.

Being no further business, Commissioner Goudreau made a motion to adjourn the meeting at noon. Commissioner Smith seconded the motion. Vote 5:0.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Evans
Clerk to the Board

Attest:

Ken Richardson
Chairman