

The Alleghany County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Wednesday, June 4, 2014, at 6:30pm in the Board Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, 348 South Main Street, Sparta, North Carolina. The purpose of this meeting was for budget discussions.

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

Chair Cox called the meeting to order, explained the purpose of the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Jane Wyatt and Peggy Choate, DSS Board Members, came before the Commissioners to discuss John Blevins', DSS Director, salary. Jane Wyatt explained the role of the Social Services Board in regards to making salary recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. She named their concerns including he is at the bottom of the pay scale and the State Office of Personnel likes to have a 40-60% difference between the Director and the next person. She explained that they have researched surrounding counties salaries in comparison. She further explained that they are seeking to raise his salary \$3,000 per year for 3 years, and the County would be responsible for \$1,500 after reimbursements per year. She said this is what the Social Services Board is requesting to the Commissioners.

Commissioner Leys and Jane Wyatt discussed John Blevins has a masters degree.

Commissioner Goudreau and Jane Wyatt discussed John Blevins' salary is currently \$58,727.

Chair Cox and County Manager Don Adams talked about John Blevins gets longevity pay.

Jane Wyatt talked about adding John Blevins' longevity to his salary brings the percentage closer together.

Rita Miller, Tax Administrator, came before the Board to discuss the reclassification of the Tax Clerk to Real Property Appraiser. She talked about the importance to the Tax Office for an appraiser, and this request is a need. She said is requesting the person to move from a grade 62 to a grade 66. She talked about reviewing the surrounding counties' data. She reviewed that the Real Property Appraiser will combine the work of the Tax Clerk. She explained that the revaluation contract included new construction and now that is almost over it will put her back in the field, and she doesn't have the time. She further explained that the Department of Revenue recommends a full-time appraiser for every 7,500-10,000 parcels, and Alleghany County has approximately 16,000 parcels. She said the Tax Clerk is already certified as a Tax Appraiser. She talked about if she continues to do the appraisal work; she won't be able to work on delinquent taxes. She used examples in collections and when the office has been fully staffed. She explained that one day of field work requires another day of office work. She reiterated her request to reclassify the Tax Clerk to Real Property Appraiser. She explained that she will still handle the appeals. She stated her appreciation for the Board's consideration of longevity, insurance and the wellness program.

Commissioner Leys and Rita Miller talked about this is not adding a new person. Rita Miller said she realizes we can't compare ourselves to others so this person will be at the bottom of that grade.

Commissioner Smith and Rita Miller talked about this person is already certified.

Chair Cox and Rita Miller talked about the Department of Revenue recommends a full-time appraiser for every 7,500-10,000 parcels, and Alleghany County has approximately 16,000 parcels. They further talked about there is no one else to step up to do this and the Business Personal Property Appraiser took the class, didn't pass the test and doesn't want to do it.

Commissioner Smith and Rita Miller talked about when Rita Miller was hired as Tax Administrator it put the department with one less employee, which is still the case.

County Manager Don Adams explained that the increase is \$5,521.50 in salary and a total cost of \$7,087.64.

Rita Miller explained that she talked to the revaluation company what it would cost for them to pick up our new construction only; \$6,000.

Josh Greene, Public Works Director, thanked the Board for the cost of living and longevity this year and for your consideration for what the County Manager put before the Commissioners this year. He talked about all county employees are underpaid. He explained that he has a very skilled Maintenance department and provided examples of the areas they have expertise in. He talked about they do everything they can to save money and provided examples of what they do in the Maintenance department and at the Transfer Facility. He reiterated the appreciation for everything the Board did this year. He asked the Board for any consideration on his salary increase requests.

County Manager Don Adams stated that it is a 6% salary increase with Maintenance being around \$6,000, Animal Control around \$800, Transfer Facility being a little less than \$6,000 then adding FICA and retirement to those numbers.

Chair Cox said the Commissioners will take this into consideration. He stated that he wants them to know that the Commissioners appreciate what the department is doing, and can see the employees doing the skilled labor.

Commissioner Leys agreed and said Josh Greene also does it with a nice attitude, too.

April Hamm, Transportation Director, thanked the Board for the time tonight. She explained that she is asking for salary increases for her staff. She reviewed her handout for each of her requests; Lead Driver from a 55 to a 57, Dispatcher/Administrative Assistant from a 58 to a 59, Administrative Assistant/Billing Clerk from a 59 to a 60, Director from a 66 to a 67. She explained the reasons for each request including additional certifications and responsibilities. She talked about they received their second safety award this year, which is great for a small system.

Commissioner Smith talked about Alleghany in Motion does an outstanding job and is a valuable asset for the county. He said he will look at this and consider it.

Commissioner Davis and April Hamm talked about part of these requests are in the operating budget and part in the administrative budget. She explained the costs to the County will be \$3,000 since the budget was frozen at the State level.

Chair Cox said thank you, and the Board will consider this.

April Hamm thanked the Board for the longevity, insurance and County employees' salary adjustments.

Linda Hash, Soil and Water Administrative Director, thanked the Board for the time to talk tonight. She explained the 61 Fund are district funds, and provided a breakdown of the County travel budget also. She reviewed the County travel budget, reasons for travel, breakdown for regular trainings they are expected to attend. She further reviewed in more detail the monies needed for her and Janie Woodle to attend all of the meetings. She explained that they use the 61 Fund to cover the shortfall in travel.

Commissioner Smith and Linda Hash talked about the annual meeting along with the training is a valuable meeting. She explained that at one of the meetings they get to meet with the State Commission too. They talked about the difference in the meetings including having district employee training.

County Manager Don Adams explained where this budget is located in the budget book.

County Manager Don Adams and Linda Hash talked about how they use County vehicles for travel.

Linda Hash talked about the 61 Fund isn't county funds. She gave examples of how the funds are spent including a scholarship for an intern. She talked about the Soil & Water Board has already approved how these funds get spent. She reviewed the Soil & Water's district's authority by the NC General Statutes. She explained they are County employees but also answers to the Soil and Water District Board. She talked about monies in the 61 Fund like EEP funds, fundraisers, grants, and donations are ways they get monies. She explained in 2011 she was voted in to serve as treasurer for the Southeast Conservation District Employees Association with approval from the Soil and Water Board, and the Soil and Water Board elected to use 61 funds for that travel. She talked about in addition to the other meetings, in order for her to fulfill her duties as treasurer; she needs to attend the southeast regional meeting. She provided additional reasons for the need to attend these meetings. She said they are having an election in the fall, and she would like to run another year. She explained that they are asking that the 61 funds be approved to be spent by the Soil and Water District Board as they have in the past.

Commissioner Leys talked about it is an honor to be voted in as treasurer for the southeast division.

Linda Hash said yes, it is an honor. She talked about of the executive board members are bonded for \$100,000, it is audited, and they have a set of bylaws.

Commissioner Leys and Linda Hamm talked about the number of members coming from 9 states. Commissioner Leys asked about local funds. Linda Hash explained that the EEP line is what the Soil and Water Board approved to use for her to travel and explained that she tries to travel the most-cost efficient way, which resulted in one airfare because it was \$200 cheaper than mileage. Linda Hash explained that she doesn't use the blazer for out-of-state travel.

County Manager Don Adams said that this kind of description has been in the budget for the past several years. He talked about the Personnel Policy says that all out-of-state travel must be approved by the Commissioners. He further talked about when the airfare became involved and when the trips started getting farther away, he asked Linda Hash to come talk about her travel and didn't want to be in conflict with the Personnel Policy about out-of-state travel. He explained in the budget there is \$0 in travel in the 61 fund, and if it is approved he will ask for the \$2,900 to be put back in.

Commissioner Leys and County Manager Don Adams talked about if this Board passes this then it is approved, and he wanted it discussed in the budget meetings.

County Manager Don Adams explained the Finance Office is to look at rules, and they flag things and double check everything with his point being this always gets flagged but if the Board passes this, it removes the issues throughout the year.

Commissioner Leys and Linda Hash talked about this is not local money; it's state or federal monies. Linda Hash explained the EEP monies, which is what this money is. Commissioner Leys reiterated that it isn't General Fund monies.

Chair Cox and County Manager Don Adams discussed where this in the budget book.

Linda Hash talked about the County gets reimbursements for staff for their technical portion. She further talked about the 61 Fund is not County dollars, and the only thing that could be local is donations, which is spent on the envirothon.

Commissioner Davis and County Manager Don Adams talked about they are only looking at the \$2,900 in 61 Fund because the other travel monies are in his recommendations. The County Manager explained the 61 Fund in the budget, and if the Broad puts it back then the Board has approved it.

County Manager Don Adams and Linda Hash talked about taking out the capital amount since there wasn't any capital listed, and it is within his authority to transfer monies for capital needs if needs arise during the year.

Chair Cox thanked Linda Hash.

Linda Hash thanked the Board, as well.

Commissioner Smith talked about when looking at the School of Government's salary publication; our salaries are towards the bottom on everything, every County employee. He asked when was the last salary study was when. County Manager Don Adams answered around 2003-2004. Commissioner Smith asked if it is done on a regular basis or whenever it comes up. The County Manager talked about it wasn't feasible to do it in the past budgets but if the Board is going to look at this then a salary study is needed. The County Manager explained what a salary study involves; the last study's results were spread out over a 3-year period, there hasn't been a study done since then but tonight is a snapshot of what we have in the majority of the departments, overall view instead of individual view.

Commissioner Smith said he is personally going to be cautious looking at certain departments rather than an overall view.

Commissioner Davis said that is what he thinking, also. He stated we've had that happen once

Chair Cox agreed and said it wasn't pretty and wasn't good among staff. He said he would love to bring everyone up to the state average. He talked about the Commissioners are trying to do that some through longevity, and once we get to 0.5 on longevity then it would be a good time

to look at salary. He stated they all are underpaid. He said that he would like to see longevity fulfilled before starting anything else.

County Manager Don Adams said that there are three areas; beginning salary, are positions appropriately ranked, longevity. He explained each area. He talked about currently trying to fix one of the three, and hopefully to fix it permanently. He further talked about the previous salary study. He explained attempting to give a cost of living and bumping up beginning salary and keeping longevity in place.

Commissioner Leys talked about if you can't give an increase annually it creates a mess because she has seen it occur.

County Manager Don Adams talked about the 0.4 get us closer on longevity. He explained that he looked at different ways to recommend salary adjustments in this budget. He further explained the longevity increase this year was a great for morale and helping people.

Chair Cox agreed and said that with insurance is a big deal along with the wellness program.

County Manager Don Adams talked about these are real issues that was heard tonight. He reiterated that the Maintenance staff is saving us lots of money. He summarized that the Tax Office dropped a position when Mary Walker retired, now Rita Miller is spending more time in collections than what she originally thought, which is not far off to what is happening in other departments either.

Chair Cox asked for additional comments.

Commissioner Smith talked about the additional budget meetings on June 17 and June 18 with the public hearing on June 25.

Chair Cox encouraged the Commissioners to talk to the County Manager if there are questions or concerns regarding the budget.

Commissioner Leys made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:51pm. Commissioner Goudreau seconded the motion. Vote 5:0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Evans
Clerk to the Board

Attest:

Larry Cox
Chairman