

May 13, 2019

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session on Monday, May 13 2019, 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Board Room of the Martin County Governmental Center, 305 East Main Street, Williamston, North Carolina.

ASSEMBLY

Chairman Tommy Bowen, Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond, Jr., Commissioner Elmo "Butch" Lilley, Commissioner Joe R. Ayers, County Manager David Bone, Clerk to the Board Jessica Godard, and Finance Director/Deputy Clerk Cindy Ange.

County Attorney Richard James was not in attendance.

Chairman Bowen called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Ayers. The invocation was provided by Commissioner Smith.

Chairman Bowen welcomed all to the meeting and thanked them for their involvement in county affairs. Elected officials recognized Sheriff Tim Manning and Bear Grass Mayor Charlotte Griffin. Chief Deputy Drew Robinson was also in attendance.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Commissioner Smith made a MOTION to approve the agenda as presented, with a SECOND by Commissioner Ayers. The Board unanimously APPROVED the motion.

BUDGET WORKSHOP / DISCUSSION

County Manager David Bone stated the purpose of the budget work session was to bring forth some of the challenges with the upcoming budget and to have some conversation regarding the priorities of the Board prior to drafting a budget that would be available for public inspection and presentation to the Board.

County Manager Bone stated the county really needed to see a 2% growth in population to maintain funding for the current levels of service. However, Martin County had been seeing a population decrease, as well as no substantial increases in revenue. There were other factors, as well, that created challenges in the budget preparation process (social services accountability, retirement benefits contribution, etc.).

County Manager Bone discussed the rough draft budget and a copy was presented to the Board of Commissioners for reference. The expenditures highlighted included:

Retirement – Increase in Retirement benefit cost of about \$80,000

Employee raises – Merit raise funds at \$100,000, which was the same as the current year amount.

County Manager Bone stated merit raises had been helpful in providing accountability and motivation for employees. County Manager Bone would like to keep these in budget, if possible. Chairman Bowen asked for clarification on the merit raise process (performance review to supervisor, dept. head, and county manager). Commissioners and staff discussed the pros and cons of COLA (cost of living adjustment) increases versus merit increases.

Health Insurance – 5% increase in health insurance. (The exact rate was not yet known at the time of the budget workshop.)

Martin County School Board – The original request was \$6,951,190. County Manager Bone and Finance Director Ange had spoken with Board of Education staff, and the updated request decreased by \$266,979, to a request of \$6,684,211 (draft amount). The request was still \$194,032 over last year's budget amount.

Vice Chairman Bond stated the Board of Education should be able to save some money with not having to maintain the several buildings that the County purchased from them. Further discussion was held regarding the decrease in enrollment and charter / private schools in the area with the obligation to pay funds to those schools.

Projects that were removed from the initial budget request included:

- Playground shade sails at South Creek Elementary – \$7,500
- Canopy at Jamesville Elementary – \$11,200
- Window units at Rodgers Elementary – \$38,000
- Field house at Riverside High School -- \$71,000
- ½ of original amount requested for band equipment – \$22,500
- Johnson Controls software for maintenance – \$71,000
- Other – insurance deductibles and contingency – \$45,000

Commissioner Ayers asked if the \$50,000 for the old Williamston Middle School and the \$60,000 for the old Edna Andrews building would be taken away from the upcoming budget. County Manager Bone did not recall that being in the original agreement. Commissioner Ayers noted that even though Edna Andrews School had been closed, the original budget request was still over \$400,000 more than last year. Finance Director Ange stated the operational expenses request did go down, but the Board of Education was requesting more money from the County, as opposed to using their fund balance.

Martin Community College –

- Original request – \$1,226,806
- After discussion with staff – request total – \$1,169,355 (Difference of \$56,451)
- Increase of \$80,301 over last year
- Current expense – increased for \$15,000 for legal
- Capital outlay – removed staging building funding and lowered amount for telephone system. Chairman Bowen stated funds for the staging building were not originally going to be requested from the county. The college may be able to use bond money for that project.

Commissioner Smith questioned the expenditures of NC Connect funds (close to \$6 million). Commissioner Smith stated he had never seen a breakdown of how that money was spent, and the money was intended to be used on facilities. County Manager Bone stated staff would make that request to MCC.

County Manager Bone stated partnering on a phone system would not provide an opportunity to save on cost, but the original request was decreased after speaking with several vendors.

Martin County –

- Data Processing – includes \$94,000 for a telephone system. County Manager Bone stated new phones were direly needed.
- Buildings – includes \$25,000 for chairs for Moratoc Park and a pick-up truck for staff.

Jail – No increase in the appropriation over last year. Vice Chairman Bond recognized Sheriff Manning for the ankle bracelet program that was saving money. Vice Chairman Bond was encouraging an additional booking program that would prevent deputies from having to travel to BMR Jail to pick up inmates.

Youth Detention – Budget of \$70,000 the same as last year. Only \$5,246 had been spent to date, but there was some uncertainty as to what would come in the future. The “Raise the Age” initiative could increase the need for funds for programs.

Commissioner Lilley questioned what happened to money that wasn’t spend. County Manager Bone stated any unspent funds would automatically go back into the fund balance.

Fire Control (NC Forest Service) – Increase of \$14,180

Rescue Squads – Increased base of \$5,000 per squad (there are a total of 5 squads in Martin County), which was an increase of \$44,940 over last year (increase in base amount plus per call rate). The number of calls per squad increased over the last year. The increase would help supplement the cost of the squads having to re-stock their own medical supplies.

Transit – The Transit Department had requested taking two part-time positions and creating a full-time position. County Manager Bone stated the salary figure would be about the same, but there would be additional funding needed for benefits for a full-time employee. County Manager Bone stated there had been difficulty in filling part-time positions, due to the certifications required to perform the duties of the job.

Landfill – \$60,000 for an unloading zone for bulk container. The current method involved having a staff member available to transfer any waste items from the ground into the bulk container. County Manager Bone stated having the unloading zone would allow citizens to dispose of their own waste and free up staff. The unloading zone would increase the efficiency at the landfill and save money in the future.

Chamber of Commerce – Increase of \$1,600.

Economic Development – The costs associated with adding the Director to County personnel were included. The investment grants for Syfan, AR Textiles and Weiton were still ongoing.

Cooperative Extension – The small farms position was taken out of the budget. That position was previously 100% funded by North Carolina A&T, but that funding was no longer available. Current staff was servicing the small farmers in Martin County.

MTW Health Department – There was a tentative increase of \$31,579 in the draft budget. It was not known at the time what the funding from Washington or Tyrrell counties would be. The three counties typically try to fund MTW Health Department consistently (try to match what the other counties do for funding).

DSS – An additional position was requested to help with Medicaid Transformation (would provide additional checks and balances in the Medical sector). \$21,000 was included for a phone system.

Adult & Aging – A position was added for Personal Care. The Council on Aging had agreed to pay one-half of the salary and benefits for the full-time position.

Misc. Human Services –

- CADA – Increase of \$10,000 to a total of \$35,000 (the request was originally \$52,000, but was cut back to \$35,000).
- Agape Dental – \$25,000. Agape is the only dental clinic in the county that accepts Medicaid. Original request was \$250,000. \$25,000 would be consistent with the allocation from Beaufort County.
- Drug Court – \$10,000 (this was a new item)
- United Way Albemarle (211 support) – \$1,000
- Food Bank – Increase of \$1,000

Library – Increase of \$5,806 (this was a slight increase from last year). The original request was \$114,000, but the proposed amount would be \$110,000. County Manager Bone stated there were many employees who had not received raises in many years, and the Martin County Library had already cut hours for employees.

Recreation – \$16,000 for a trails grant project. The project was up in the air, due to some issues with wetlands delineation, but staff was optimistic that it would be completed. Finance Director Ange had been speaking with Martin County TDA about a match from their organization, as well.

Arts – \$11,242 for catwalk lighting in Martin County Auditorium. This item came about from the meeting with the Board of Education. In the past, Martin County had an agreement with Martin County Schools and Martin Community Players for a cost-share of the lighting upgrades in the Martin County Auditorium. The catwalk would be on a cost-share basis similar to the lighting project (40% Martin County, 40% Board of Education, 20% Martin Community Players).

Roanoke River Basin – Increase of \$1,375 requested. County Manager Bone recommended keeping the allocation at \$1,000 like in previous years.

Water – A revenue shortage for the water districts increased by \$62,612. There were not enough customers, and the rates were already high. There was lots of usage last year, due to substantial leaks. The fee from the water authority is based on the prior year's usage. The Board was still hopeful about the possibility of legislation that would help small counties with debt issues.

COMMENTS / DISCUSSION

County Manager Bone stated with the cuts, the current draft budget was about \$1.9 million out of balance, not including a Fund Balance appropriation. To protect further depletion of Fund Balance and Hospital Fund, County Manager Bone recommended making up the difference with either a tax increase or additional cuts. County Manager asked the Commissioners for feedback regarding the need or desire for any additional cuts. The current tax rate was 79 cents plus fire district taxes (between 4 and 8 cent, depending on which district), and the solid waste availability fee was \$172.

Chairman Bowen was not supportive of a 4 cent tax increase for Martin County residents. Commissioner Smith stated many counties would have to increase tax rates to meet their obligations. In order to provide services the county demands the requesting organizations to provide, more money would be needed, and there would need to be a tax increase.

County Manager Bone stated one point of entry, staffing/equipment for one point of entry, and the storage building for EM/Sheriff projects were not included in the draft budget. Those projects would require additional money.

Commissioner Lilley was supportive of having a COLA increase of 2% for all employees, as opposed to continuing with merit increases. The Board agreed with the COLA increase. Also, because of the amount in the Board of Education's fund balance, Commissioner Lilley stated the school board could absorb some cuts from the county's allocation.

Commissioner Lilley stated Martin Community College was doing well, and he was not supportive of an \$80,000 increase for their budget. Regarding the draft budget for MTW Health Department, Commissioner Lilley felt Martin County should not allocate more funds unless Washington and Tyrrell counties increased their allocations.

Commissioner Lilley expressed concerns about the process of obtaining a septic tank permit in Martin County. According to the latest report, there were 68 total septic tank permits issued for the year. Many citizens were having to wait up to one and a half months to obtain their permits.

Commissioner Smith expressed concerns, stating he did not feel Martin County citizens were receiving adequate services from MTW Health Department, as compared with the amount of money that was received from Martin County. Commissioner Smith stated a dental clinic should be in Martin County, and the mobile van just was not the same as a clinic.

Chairman Bowen wanted to take away the library increase. Commissioner Smith stated many people did not have access to broadband and relied on the library for internet access. Chairman Bowen stated they would still have access; it would not make the library go away. Commissioner

Ayers stated cuts were needed, and they had to start somewhere. Multiple organizations requesting \$5,000 would add up quickly. Commissioner Ayers stated he cared about Martin County's tax rate. Commissioner Ayers stated cuts would need to be made to help prevent a high increase in the tax rate.

The Board agreed that there needed to be another workshop prior to the manager's presentation of the draft budget on Wednesday, May 22, 2019. The Board agreed to meet for an additional budget workshop on Monday, May 20, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom. County Manager Bone would update the draft budget based on direction from the Board.

Chairman Bowen discussed the unloading zone project at the landfill. Chairman Bowen did not feel that there was enough traffic and waste unloading at the landfill to justify the \$60,000 project at that time. After further discussion, the consensus from the Board was to wait a year on that project. It was the consensus of the Board to hold off on the one point of entry project, as well.

The Board desired the draft budget reflect only an approximate 2 cent tax increase, as the Board felt a 4 cent increase was too high.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Vice Chairman Bond made a MOTION to adjourn the meeting. Hearing no objections, Chairman Bowen adjourned the meeting at 8:33 p.m. The next meeting would be a Special Called Meeting for an additional Budget Workshop to be held on Monday, May 20, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom.

Tommy Bowen, Chairman

Jessica Godard, Clerk to the Board