

May 8, 2020

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in a Special Called Session on Friday, May 8, 2020 at 3:00 p.m. in the Martin County Governmental Center, Commissioners' Boardroom at 305 East Main Street, Williamston, North Carolina.

ASSEMBLY

Present at the Governmental Center: Chairman Tommy Bowen, County Manager David Bone, Clerk to the Board Jessica Godard, Sheriff Tim Manning, Chief Deputy Drew Robinson, and Public Works Director Justin Harrison.

Present via Cisco Webex: Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond, Jr., Commissioner Elmo "Butch" Lilley, Commissioner Ronnie Smith, Commissioner Joe R. Ayers, Emergency Management Director Jody Griffin, Finance Director/Deputy Clerk Cindy Ange, and Public Health Director Wes Gray.

County Attorney Richard James was not in attendance.

Chairman Bowen performed a roll call of the Commissioners, and then Chairman Bowen called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. Chairman Bowen led the Pledge of Allegiance and provided the invocation.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Vice Chairman Bond made a MOTION to approve the agenda as presented, with a SECOND by Commissioner Smith. The Board APPROVED the motion unanimously (5-0).

Consideration of Reopening County Facilities to the Public on a Limited Basis

County Manager Bone reviewed the Stay-at-Home orders that had been issued by Governor Roy Cooper and discussed what Martin County had done in response to COVID-19. County Manager Bone stated he made an administrative decision on March 26, 2020 to make adjustments to access to County facilities to promote safety of staff and citizens (access by appointment only). On March 27, 2020, the License Plate Agency was limited to dealers only due to some challenges. County Manager Bone made these administrative decisions, stating none of the decisions went against any Stay-at-Home order issued by Governor Roy Cooper, nor were they required.

County Manager Bone recalled Gov. Cooper had issued a more relaxed stay-at-home order, but stated in phase one of this order, there was still a limitation of 10 people in a gathering, as well as continued restrictions for restaurants and other businesses. County Manager Bone stated staff had coordinated a plan to loosen some of the restrictions at that Martin County Governmental Center to allow more controlled access to the building.

County Manager Bone explained Sheriff Tim Manning had plans to re-deploy Student Resource Officers at each entrance of the courthouse to ensure social distancing and to allow only a certain number of people into the courthouse and each department at a time. Handwashing stations

would remain outside each entrance, as well as additional hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the building. Public Works Director Justin Harrison and his staff had worked to get plexiglass barriers put up in various departments with direct contact with citizens (License Plate Agency, Register of Deeds, Tax Collector/Assessor offices).

Health Director Wes Gray participated remotely in the meeting to provide information and be available for any questions. County Manager Bone stated Mr. Gray supported the re-opening of the Courthouse with the discussed limitations. County Manager Bone stated Clerk of Court Tonya Leggett was unable to attend today's meeting, but stated she conveyed her support, as well. County Manager Bone stated with the discussed plan, the Courthouse could be re-opened while keeping staff and citizens safe.

County Manager Bone stated he reached out to each Commissioner on Wednesday, May 6, 2020 to discuss the plans to re-open. Although this decision could be handled administratively, County Manager Bone wanted the blessing from the Commissioners before moving forward with re-opening the Courthouse with limitations. There was not a consensus to move forward with the individual discussions. Therefore, Chairman Bowen asked for this special called meeting.

Vice Chairman Bond asked if people coming into the courthouse would be required to wear a mask and voiced his concerns about the safety of employees. Vice Chairman Bond asked about any type of testing for employees and questioned whether every employee would have to be quarantined, should an employee test positive for COVID-19. County Manager Bone stated staff reached out to each department, and based on discussions with Emergency Management and Public Health officials, there were no plans to require employees or the public to wear masks. The use of masks was being encouraged and promoted. Masks were provided for staff if they chose to wear them.

Public Health Director Wes Gray stated the recommendations for an employee that tested positive in a workspace would be to send that employee home and send home the close contacts (people who are in a closed space or within 6 feet for longer than 10 minutes). Also, quarantining any close contacts and monitoring for symptoms was recommended, as opposed to shutting down a business completely. Also, deep cleaning of any areas where those sick employees were. Regarding testing, Director Gray stated all medical providers and hospitals in the MTW district all had tests, and had guidelines for performing those tests (symptomatic patients). The tests take approximately 24-48 hours for results, and the patient and/or their close contacts were encouraged to stay home until results were received.

Commissioner Smith asked Director Gray how many people in Martin County had been tested for COVID-19. The requirement for providers to report how many tests were administered was dropped the previous month, so the Health Department had only been receiving reports of positive tests. Commissioner Smith wanted to know how many tests had been administered in Martin County, how many people in Martin County had been tested. At least 148 people had been tested in Martin County. Many positive test results being received were coming from providers outside of Martin County. The Health Department was testing people on an appointment basis. Commissioner Smith asked again, how many people had been tested at the Health Department, Director Gray reported 48 people had been tested.

Commissioner Smith asked Chairman Bowen if the Board was meeting today to make a decision or just to have a discussion. Chairman Bowen stated he would like for a decision to be made because he felt like the County needed to move forward with reopening. Commissioner Smith recalled County Manager Bone made an administrative decision in March 2020 and had the power to make the change now, therefore questioning why the meeting was being held with the Board of Commissioners for a decision and who had the authority in this situation.

County Manager Bone reiterated Director Gray did not have an exact figure on how many residents had been tested in Martin County because of the withdrawn requirement to report all tests performed. Commissioner Smith recalled Director Gray did have the information for tests done by MTW District Health.

County Manager Bone stated based on his authority, he made the decision to limit access to the Governmental Center back in March 2020. Even though readjusting access to the Governmental Center was within County Manager Bone's authority, he wanted to move forward in a way where all Commissioners were informed about the safety precautions being taken, and ideally, all Commissioners be in agreement with that decision. Commissioner Smith asked if this reopening was sending the message that other businesses could follow, and County Manager Bone stated this was only going to affect the Governmental Center.

Sheriff Manning explained the proposed procedures that would be in place to control the flow of foot traffic coming into the Courthouse. There would be no loitering in the hallways. Sheriff Manning stated the Officers would have the District and Superior Court schedules to allow that flow, as well. Sheriff Manning had communicated with each department head to find out how many people would be allowed in the office at a time. There would be a separate door for entrance and exit to allow for social distancing. There would be cones outside the entrance placed 6 feet apart for further social distancing measures.

Commissioner Smith asked how it would be dealt with if staff felt as if they were being put into harm's way with the courthouse reopening. County Manager Bone stated he would communicate the decision with employees. He stated if an employee felt as if they were in a dangerous situation based on age or medical condition, they could consult their doctor for a note and apply for emergency sick leave. County Manager Bone stated there would be much more social distancing control than was seen in most retail stores.

Vice Chairman Bond stated if the license plate agency were reopened, there would be people coming from several surrounding counties, and voiced his concerns about the uncertainty of what was being brought into Martin County. Vice Chairman Bond stated he did not want to see Martin County staff put in harm's way.

Chairman Bowen stated he did not want to see any employees put in harm's way. Chairman Bowen stated many employees had likely been to retail stores in the past few weeks and stated any employees that were concerned would use protective measures and social distancing. Chairman Bowen stated the virus had not stopped the retailers, and it should not keep the courthouse shut down. Chairman Bowen felt the measures that had been discussed were sufficient.

County Manager Bone stated courts were due to open back up June 1, 2020. Clerk of Court Tonya Leggett had advocated to him resuming certain services now to alleviate some of the workload on June 1, 2020 when courts were reopened. Director Gray and Judge Parker had done walk-throughs of both courtrooms to make plans for social distancing and cleaning to be able to run the court system effectively one reopened.

Director Gray stated the numbers for the MTW District had stayed relatively stable, other than clusters here and there due to testing family members. Martin County's numbers were relatively stable considering the larger number of large retailers as compared to Washington and Tyrell counties. Director Gray did explain that using protective measures and social distancing were still important to being able to ease out of the restrictions in a smart way.

Commissioner Lilley thanked Martin County staff, MTW staff and Sheriff Tim Manning for their work to protect staff and citizens. Commissioner Ayers echoed Commissioner Lilley's comments, and thought the plan to move forward was a good plan.

Commissioner Ayers made a MOTION to re-open the courthouse, with the plans as discussed by County Manager Bone, starting Monday, May 11, 2020, with a SECOND from Commissioner Lilley. The motion carried with a vote of 3-2.

AYE:
Chairman Bowen
Commissioner Lilley
Commissioner Ayers

NO:
Vice Chairman Bond
Commissioner Smith

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Commissioner Ayers made a MOTION to adjourn at 3:36 p.m., with a SECOND by Commissioner Lilley. The Board APPROVED the motion unanimously (5-0). The next scheduled meeting would be Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom, 305 East Main Street, Williamston, NC 27892. This meeting would be conducted electronically.

Tommy Bowen, Chairman

Jessica Godard, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board