

February 10, 2021

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on Wednesday, February 10, 2021, 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Boardroom at the Martin County Governmental Center, 305 East Main Street, Williamston, North Carolina.

ASSEMBLY

Present in the Boardroom: Chairman Ronnie Smith, Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond, Jr., Commissioner Joe R. Ayers, Commissioner Emily Biggs, Commissioner David “Skip” Gurganus, County Manager James Bennett, Clerk to the Board Jessica Godard, County Attorney Richard James and Sheriff Tim Manning (with Chief Deputy Drew Robinson).

Present via Cisco WebEx: Lead for North Carolina Fellow Elizabeth Mitchell and Finance Officer Cindy Ange.

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Biggs led the Pledge of Allegiance, and Commissioner Gurganus provided the invocation.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Commissioner Biggs made a MOTION to approve the agenda as presented, with a SECOND from Vice Chairman Bond. The Board APPROVED the motion unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no written comments submitted to the Clerk prior to the meeting. In order to maintain transparency, a brief moment was observed to allow anyone watching Facebook live to provide comments. No comments were offered on the Facebook live stream.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Gurganus made a MOTION to approve the consent agenda as presented, with a SECOND by Commissioner Biggs. The Board APPROVED the motion unanimously via a roll call vote.

- 1. Minutes** for January 5th, 2021 Special Called Meeting (Open and Closed Sessions), January 13, 2021 Regular Session, and January 26th Special Called Meeting (Open and Closed Sessions)
- 2. Financial Report** for January 2021
- 3. Request for Records Disposal for Martin County Finance, Personnel, and BMR Jail Records**

Requests were received from Finance Officer Cindy Ange for disposal of old records for Martin County, old Personnel records, and old BMR records. These requests were APPROVED as part of the consent agenda.

4. Tax Assessor – Tax Refund Requests – January 2021 -- None

5. Tax Assessor – Tax Relief Orders –January 2021

Year Levy	Lname	Fname	Reason	Value	Total
2021	Elliott L Turner Plumbing		Double Billed		8.10
2021	Groover	Tracy Ann	Sold Vehicle		5.18
2021	Groover	Tracy Ann	Sold Vehicle		5.53
2021	Groover	Tracy Ann	Sold Vehicle		5.31
2021	Groover	Tracy Ann	Sold Vehicle		5.23
2021	Groover	Tracy Ann	Sold Vehicle		5.02
2021	Keel	Deborah Purvis	Out of County		4.79
2021	Lynn	William Allen	Out of County		9.84
2021	Savage	Greta Junita	Double Billed		26.64
2021	Savage	Greta Junita	Double Billed		26.80
2021	Savage	Greta Junita	Double Billed		25.73
			<i>Total Real & Personal Releases</i>		\$128.17
2021	Sykes	Jodie Lawrence	Mileage		18.65
			<i>Total VTS Refund Requests</i>		\$ 18.65

6. Tax Collector’s Report –December 2020

	Category	Jan-21	Jan-21 Y-T-D
Real Property	20	\$1,178,027.58	\$8,585,885.02
Personal Property	25	<u>693,652.35</u>	5,115,876.01
Total		\$1,871,679.93	\$13,701,761.03
Motor Vehicle	30	<u>\$0</u>	<u>271.69</u>
Total MV		\$0	271.69
All Total		\$1,871,679.93	\$13,702.032.72

7. Tax Collector – Request to Advertise 2019-20 Liens on Unpaid Taxes

Revenue Collections Manager Christine Blevins requested that all unpaid property taxes be advertised in the Enterprise newspaper on April 8, 2021 or as soon as is possible thereafter according to G.S. 105-369 of the Machinery Act of North Carolina.

This was APPROVED as part of the consent agenda.

8. Resolution Authorizing Persons to Sign Requisition for Funds Forms for Martin County Related to the Community Development Block Grant – Coronavirus Program

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING PERSONS TO SIGN REQUISITION FOR FUNDS
FORMS FOR MARTIN COUNTY RELATED TO THE COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT – CORONAVIRUS PROGRAM**

WHEREAS, Martin County has the need for financial relief due to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 in Martin County, and;

WHEREAS, Martin County has applied for grant funding from the State of North Carolina under the Community Development Block Grant – Coronavirus Program, and;

WHEREAS, Martin County has received a grant offer for a \$900,000 grant under the Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus Program;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, *by the Martin County Board of Commissioners that the following individuals are hereby authorized sign Requisition for Funds forms on behalf of Martin County for the Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus Program:*

1. James Bennett – County Manager
2. Cindy Ange – Finance Officer
3. Janice Young – Assistant Finance Officer

Adopted this 10th day of February, 2021, at Martin County, North Carolina.

9. Board Appointments/Reappointments

Rivers East Workforce Development Board

Mr. Ken Holstein was no longer with Flagstone Foods. Ms. Jennie Bowen, Workforce Development Coordinator stated the Workforce Development Board needed a private sector member appointed by the Board of Commissioners to fill that vacancy. Ms. Tanisha Baker with Penco Products agreed to serve on that Board.

Staff recommended the appointment of Ms. Tanisha Baker of Penco Products to the Rivers East Workforce Development Board, as recommended.

This appointment was APPROVED as part of the consent agenda.

Martin County Council on Aging

The Council of Aging, Inc. recommended the reappointments of Mr. Barney Conway, Ms. Becky Dymek, Ms. Betty Jones, and Mr. Jerry McCrary for an additional term. The terms would be for three-years, and would expire February 10, 2024.

Council of Aging bylaws state members can serve only two (2) consecutive terms.

The above listed reappointments were APPROVED as part of the consent agenda.

Community Child Protection Team

The Community Child Protection Team (CCPT) was established by law (General Statute 7B-1406) in May of 1991 as a means for the state and local communities to form a partnership to strengthen child protection. The CCPT is an interdisciplinary group of community representatives who meet regularly to promote a community-wide approach to the problem of child abuse and neglect.

Community Child Protection Team reviews are designed to assist DSS and families in protecting children by identifying barriers in services and collaborating on strategies to remedy the situation. The purpose of these reviews is also to inform county commissioners about actions needed to prevent child abuse, neglect or dependency.

Membership is mandated by law and includes various ex officio positions throughout the community. The Board of Commissioners shall appoint a law enforcement officer and a maximum of five additional members to represent various county agencies or the community at large to serve on the local CCPT. Team members appointed by the Board of County Commissioners should represent the diversity of the community.

Although the terms are on-going, the Board of Commissioners is being asked to appoint/reappoint the following individuals to the Martin County Community Child Protection Team, in an effort to keep the list of Board of Commissioners' appointments current:

County DSS Director – Angela Ellis
Law Enforcement Officer – Drew Robinson
Attorney – Seth Edwards
School Superintendent – Clay Wagner, Designee
County Social Services Board – Juanita Brown (was previously Rachel Craddock)
Mental Health Professional – Hope Eley, Trillium
Guardian Ad Litem Coordinator – Michele Benson
Public Health Director – Wes Gray / Vickey Manning, Designee
Local Health Care Provider – Kristi Hassell, RN

Additional five team members include:

Jason Steward – Director of Martin County Communications
Stacey Pippin – Williamston Fire and Rescue
Jane Pacenta – Parent Representative
Deborah Fonville – Department of Public Safety, Juvenile Services
Jodie Bickerstaff – Memorial Baptist Preschool

The above named individuals were reappointed as part of the consent agenda.

Child Fatality Prevention Team

The North Carolina Child Fatality Prevention System has three tiers. The North Carolina Child Fatality Prevention Task Force (a legislative study commission), the North Carolina Child Fatality Prevention Team (a state team, which reviews child death through the Medical Examiner system), and the Community Child Protection Teams, which review active cases of suspected abuse and neglect, and child deaths due to suspected abuse and neglect.

Legislatively established in 1993, the local child fatality prevention teams (CFPT) operate as a sub-committee of the Community Child Protection Teams in all 100 counties. The local health departments has the responsibility of ensuring that these teams are operational.

The Martin County Child Fatality Prevention Team had no changes in membership this year. However, the Board is asked to approve the membership list for continuity.

- Law Enforcement Officer – Sheriff Tim Manning or his designee
- EMS/Fire Fighter – Captain Stacey Pippin, Williamston Fire Department
- Parent Representative – Mrs. Jane Pacenta
- Other County Commissioner Appointee – Mr. James Ward, Department of Public Safety
- Other County Commissioner Appointee – Chief Travis Cowan or his designee, Williamston Police Department
- Other County Commissioner Appointee – Ms. Sandy Rhodes, Center for Family Violence Prevention

Terms would be ongoing until the individual no longer serves, vacates the position or replaced in the board.

The above named individuals were reappointed as part of the consent agenda.

Tourism Development Authority

Mr. Chase Conner, Director of the Martin County Chamber of Commerce, has expressed interest in serving on the Martin County Tourism Development Authority Board.

Mr. Conner had an address of Washington, NC. However, TDA Director Barney Conway confirmed that Mr. Conner's address was in fact inside of Martin County.

Staff recommended the Board approve the appointment of Mr. Chase Conner to the Martin County Tourism Development Authority Board.

The appointment of Mr. Conner was APPROVED as part of the consent agenda.

10. Clerk Report included for informational purposes.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW EMPLOYEE(S)

Ms. Angela Ellis was introduced to the Board as the new Director for Martin County DSS and Transit. Ms. Ellis was sworn in on February 1, 2021. Chairman Smith stated Ms. Ellis came from Greene County.

Ms. Ellis stated she had been with Greene County for the past 23 years, but was looking forward to learning about Martin County. Ms. Ellis stated she also looked forward to building new partnerships, as well as advocating for the citizens of Martin County.

Commissioner Gurganus and Vice Chairman Bond welcomed Ms. Ellis to Martin County and stated they looked forward to working with her.

Commissioner Ayers also welcomed Ms. Ellis. He forwarded some concerns that had been expressed to him regarding Saturday transit buses.

Commissioner Biggs also welcomed Ms. Ellis. County Manager Bennett also welcomed Ms. Ellis.

PRESENTATIONS

COVID-19 Update

MTW Health Director Wes Gray was present via Cisco Webex to provide the monthly COVID-19 update to the Board of Commissioners. Director Gray stated North Carolina surpassed two milestones the day before, surpassing 800,000 total cases and 10,000 deaths across the state of North Carolina. There had been a large decrease in cases since the Christmas spike of cases.

Director Gray discussed the number of tests and percent positive rate in Martin County, showing the number of percent positives had decreased significantly over the previous few weeks (peaked around the end of December 2020/beginning of January 2021). Director Gray stated Martin County changed from red to orange in the County Alert system at the last update, and would likely go to yellow in the next week's update.

Martin County had 1976 total cases, 1757 recoveries (181 active cases). There were over 400 active cases at the last update Director Gray provided. There had been 38 deaths, and there were currently 23 Martin County residents that were hospitalized. There had been an average of seven new cases per day (33 new cases) since February 5, 2021.

Director Gray provided an update on vaccinations in Martin County. He stated a total of 3,950 vaccines had been given in Martin County since the first dose was administered on December 23, 2020. There were still 4,800 people registered for vaccines. The Governor had made an announcement earlier in the day to open Phase 3 candidates for vaccination, including essential workers, and teachers/school employees.

Director Gray then highlighted COVID cases and COVID deaths by age, gender, race and ethnicity in Martin County. Next, Director Gray discussed total tests completed in North Carolina, stating 89.3% of the population of NC had been tested.

There were two active outbreaks in Martin County – Roanoke River Nursing and Rehabilitation and Williamston Primary School.

Director Gray discussed the vaccination dashboard which highlighted the number of doses distributed compared with shots given, percentage of doses used, and percentage of the population with 1st doses and 2nd doses. Director Gray discussed dose distribution, stating the current weekly doses was 400 doses per week for Martin County.

Commissioner Gurganus asked what the process was for someone in Martin County over the age of 65 to be signed up to get a vaccination. Director Gray stated they could call the health department, leave a message, and get a call back to be registered and scheduled. He also stated there was a link on their website for the patient to go ahead and register. Patients were prioritized based on risk factors, and then would be scheduled for a vaccine. Commissioner Gurganus stated he had been getting lots of calls from concerned citizens over the past few weeks having issues

getting scheduled for the vaccine, and folks being able to go to Bertie County and get a vaccine without an appointment. Director Gray stated staff had been receiving an overwhelming number of phone calls over the past few weeks, with over 700 calls in Martin County alone in one day. He stated staff were working diligently to call back all patients, but the waiting list was much longer than the number of doses that were available. The Health Department was not receiving enough doses to do large drive thru events, but they were planning to apply for a grant to get a large number of doses to have an event at Riverside High School. Temporary staff had been hired to help with returning phone calls to continue scheduling people.

Chairman Smith stated many people did not understand the process. He stated there were other providers other than the health department that were receiving dosages, and the county only received a certain number of doses. Those private entities were receiving funding for providing the vaccines, but the county was only receiving a small administration fee for administering the vaccines. Director Gray explained the process of how doses had been distributed and stated Albemarle Regional Health system had been part of a pilot program. He also stated there were many doses that were diverted from Martin and some other counties for large events in the western part of the state. With the potential of an additional vaccine being approved in the near future, there was hope that more vaccines would be able to be administered soon.

If a resident goes outside the county to receive their first vaccine, they are asked to return to that same county to get their second dose, because of the amount of allotments per county.

Commissioner Biggs stated she was thankful that educators were being worked in to receive the vaccine.

NCPTS (North Carolina Property Tax Solution) – David Baker

Chairman Smith introduced Mr. Baker to speak with the Board about NCPTS, which was a program that had been around for a while. Chairman Smith stated he wanted the Board to be aware of this program, and stated there were many counties that had begun this program. He stated no action would be taken tonight.

Mr. Baker stated NCPTS was a software package that was supported by the NCACC. He provided some background of his career, and spoke about his current position with the NCACC as the Director of Tax and Revenue Outreach.

Mr. Baker provided a brief overview of NCPTS. He stated is more than just a software system – is a membership service and a collaborative effort. He stated the system was county owned and maintained. The NCPTS County collaborative showed a partnership between the NCACC, the counties, and Farragut (a software vendor). The NCACC owns the software license, but it would be provided to any counties involved, free of charge. The county would contract with Farragut to do implantation of software, as well as for maintenance.

Mr. Baker stated the goal of NCPTS was a consistent application of property tax law by NCPTS counties through best business practices. He stated a greater consistency in appraisals and higher collection rates was ideal for counties, utilizing the best property tax system possible. Mr. Baker stated there were 19 NCPTS counties, stating NCPTS members represent over 50% of the NC Property Tax Base. Mr. Baker stated Durham County voted the previous week to become a member of NCPTS.

Mr. Baker discussed the oversight committee, stated it was a collaborative nine-member committee that served to continuously improve NCPTS and promote best practice sharing among member counties. The Counties decide what the software should look like for their county. Mr. Baker stated the oversight committee was the body that decided how money was spent.

Mr. Baker then discussed the sub-committees user groups (LR/CAMA Sub-Committee User Group and B&C Sub-Committee User Group). He stated those two committees met every Tuesday with county employees that make decisions about what was needed in the software.

Mr. Baker stated he hoped Martin County would look into the system and stated a demo could be set up if that was desired.

Chairman Smith thanked Mr. Baker for taking the time to provide a presentation on such short notice. Chairman Smith asked Mr. Baker to give the Board a sense of what NC has that many other states do not have when it comes to this particular program. Mr. Baker stated the same software was being used and promoted outside of NC, but he did not know of another state that had a program that was totally controlled by the County, like NCPTS. He stated many programs being used were outdated and in danger of cyberattacks. He stated NCPTS was more up to date and cutting-edge concerning protecting counties from cyberattacks.

Commissioner Ayers asked how much it would cost to implement the program and get it in place, and any yearly sustainable fees. Mr. Baker stated he could coordinate with Farragut and work on numbers specific to Martin County, based on size of the county and the number of bills generated. He stated their costs were very competitive. He stated he would get exact numbers for Martin County back to staff.

Chairman Smith stated he had seen the operation of the program for quite a few years, and he had spoken with Commissioners of some of the member counties about the program. Chairman Smith stated tonight's presentation was very brief to just make the Board aware of it. He hoped the Board would be able to have a more in-depth presentation at a later date.

Chairman Smith thanked Mr. Baker for his presentation tonight and looked forward to getting additional information about the program.

David Baker stated for smaller counties, there was a cloud solution to avoid investing in a lot of equipment.

Chairman Smith stated assessment of properties could be very subjective. He asked if the assessment and appraisal process was more consistent with this program. Mr. Baker stated there was support available for the software to ensure fair and consistent appraisals for citizens.

Commissioner Gurganus asked for clarification regarding the statement of "greater consistency of appraisals and higher collection rates". Mr. Baker stated the system aimed to provide consistency in appraisal. Mr. Baker stated the system provides all of the tools a collector needs to get collection rates up where the county would like it to be. Overall, counties with NCPTS have about 1% higher collection rate than counties without the system. Commissioner Gurganus confirmed the system may fairly increase value in appraisals, but he was concerned that may result in higher taxes. Mr. Baker stated laws would be applied fairly and consistently.

Commissioner Ayers stated in his experience, collection rates can range from 93% to 98%, which meant someone was not paying taxes. In-house staff was vital in the rate of tax collection. Commissioner Ayers stated he did not see how the software would improve the collection rate, citing again that in house staff really determined the rate of collection.

Chairman Smith asked Mr. Baker to talk about systems in place to help counties collect taxes. Mr. Baker stated the tools were developed tools to allow staff to more efficiently collect the taxes and do their job, increasing the collection rate.

Commissioner Gurganus clarified the software would “level the playing field” in terms of value assessment. Mr. Baker stated the system used the best business practices to consistently apply the tax laws.

Chairman Smith again thanked Mr. Baker for his presentation.

Update on Career Technical Center

Martin County Schools Superintendent Dr. David Fonseca was present via Cisco Webex, along with Mr. Jim Guard, Mr. Hank Edwards, and Mr. Doug Bullock to provide an update on the Career Technical Center project. Dr. Fonseca thanked the Board of Commissioners for their continued partnership.

Mr. Jim Guard stated he and Mr. Edwards were excited for the opportunity to provide an update on the Career Technical Center. Mr. Guard stated Martin County Schools (MCS) staff was meeting with Oakley & Collier Architects and a representative from AR Chesson on the contracting process on the Career Technical Center.

Mr. Guard provided an update on a meeting that held in January 2021, stating items discussed included roofing, HVAC, sprinkler and septic systems for the building. Also discussed at this meeting was the shipment of specialized steel that had to be used to construct the main entrance and other components of the building. Percentages of completion were also discussed, which led to being able to store equipment and other items in the building. Updates were provided, and a revised schedule would be issued in February 2024. Due to weather, a reboot was needed for the parking lot and other components.

Another update was provided on January 27th, 2021. Issues discussed included internet, cable placement, TV placement for display and instruction, and specialized steel for reinforcement.

On February 4th, 2021, items discussed included general concerns including scheduling adjustments. On February 10th, 2021, another update was provided regarding completion, electrical boxes, wiring for advanced manufacturing and metal fabrication labs, along with health sciences classrooms.

Currently, MCS was working on getting community input on the naming of the career technical center facility. Also, there had been several zoom meetings with furniture contractors to select furniture. The goal was to create a facility that would last many years, but remain exciting enough to be able to recruit students. Staff was working with internet and other IT representatives.

At this point, staff felt the project was on target to get students in the career technical center in August of 2021 and have a high class program that the community could be proud of.

Chairman Smith thanked MCS staff for the update. Mr. Edwards stated the school board could be given a complete update at their March 2021 meeting.

4-H Presentation

Mr. Desmond Miller, Martin County 4-H agent, was present to provide an update on programs in Martin County. Mr. Miller stated 4-H wanted to continue great things in Martin County, such as livestock shows, and focus on STEM activities. Mr. Miller stated there were some goals 4-H had, which involved drones, focus on agro business, and youth development and leadership. Another goal was to have a youth council in every town, getting young people more involved and in leadership roles.

Other goals included building up summer camps, which provided many volunteer opportunities in the county. Building the community and building leaders for the community was important for 4-H. Collaborating with civic organizations, MCS, police/sheriff, fire departments, and others to grow the youth of the community were main goals of 4-H. Mr. Miller stated it would take everyone in the community to support the youth.

Chairman Smith stated he was very proud of the work Mr. Miller had done and looked forward to the continued work in the county.

Child Fatality Prevention Team

Ms. Vickey Manning of MTW District Health Department was present via Cisco Webex to provide an annual report on the Child Fatality Prevention Team. Ms. Manning stated North Carolina had a three tier Child Fatality Prevention Team of which the local child fatality prevention teams were one component. The three tiers of the system include the NC Child Fatality Prevention Task Force (legislative study commission), the NC Child Fatality Prevention Team (state team which reviews child death through the Medical Examiner System), and the Community Child Protection Team (review active cases of suspected abuse and neglect, and child deaths due to suspected abuse and neglect). The local child fatality prevention teams were legislatively established in 1993 and there were teams in all 100 counties. It is the responsibility of the local health departments to assure that those teams were operational.

Ms. Manning stated the mission of the local team is to review the deaths of children, ages 0-17 years, that were not due to suspected abuse or neglect and about which no previous report of abuse or neglect had been made to the county department of social services within the past 12 months. The local CFPTs review child deaths due to homicide, suicide, fires, illness, prematurity and perinatal cause, among others, and search for ways to prevent child deaths.

Ms. Manning explained the purpose of the local child fatality prevention teams were to: 1) identify the causes of child deaths; 2) identify gaps or deficiencies that may exist in order to improve the delivery of services to children and families; and 3) make recommendations for changes and carry out changes that could prevent future child fatalities.

Ms. Manning stated CFPT meetings were closed to the public. However, each local CFPT would schedule at least two public meetings annually, one presentation to the County Commissioners and one presentation to the Board of Public Health.

Ms. Manning shared some of the examples of recommendations that started at a local CFPT and later became requirements or laws included the following:

- ATV laws requiring use of helmets and that drivers be of certain age;
- Graduated driver's licensing
- Requiring carbon monoxide detectors in rental property and single/multi-family homes
- Infant homicide prevention act – safe surrender
- Transporting children in open bed trucks

The Martin County Child Fatality Prevention Team, a sub-committee of the Martin County Child Protection Team, meets, typically, 4 times per year. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the activities of the team were quite different during 2020. The team met virtually on three separate occasions: March 5, October 1, and December 5, 2020. There were seven child fatalities (from 2019) that were reviewed in 2020. Four of those fatalities were the result of significant birth defects/perinatal conditions. One was an accidental drowning. There was one case where significant substance use as well as limited prenatal care appeared to have a direct correlation to the child's demise. The last case was one where the child died by a head injury that was caused by other than accidental means.

In the past, the team has participated in and sponsored a blue-ribbon campaign and a bubble release ceremony. Due to the need to refrain from large gatherings, there had been social media campaigns to spread awareness. Due to some recent concerns, the team would be joining the Martin County Child Protection Team and the Safe Kids Riverbend Coalition to promote safe sleep practices.

There were no questions from the Board.

Annual Child Community Protection Team Report

Ms. Nancy Conner from Martin County DSS introduced herself to the new Board members. She has worked with Martin County DSS for 20 years. Ms. Conner is the Chair of the Community Child Protection Team and stated this was an annual report to the Commissioners.

Ms. Conner explained the Community Child Protection Team was established by law in May of 1991 as a means for the state and local communities to form a partnership to strengthen child protection. The CCPT meets once a month and partners with local partners to discuss high risk cases.

Ms. Conner stated the team had been meeting via webex during the COVID pandemic. The Martin County CCPT met 8 times and discussed 8 cases. OF those eight cases, some of the contributing factors were domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health.

Ms. Conner stated in 2019, Martin County DSS assumed custody of 11 children under the age of 18. In 2020, Martin County DSS assumed custody of 23 children under the age of 18. The number of children in custody increased by 50%. Out of 23 children, 8 were taken into custody as the primary factor being substance abuse, 12 children were in situations of domestic violence, 3

children due to mental health factors in the home. These factors place children at risk for failure to thrive issues, mental health issues, unstable housing, educational delays, truancy, and improper supervision.

In 2020, Martin County DSS established permanence for 14 children. Out of the 14 children, 5 were adopted, 2 children received permanence by guardianship or custody with a family member, 4 children received permanence with their foster parents and 3 returned to their non-removal parent.

In 2020, Martin County DS received 261 Child Protective Services reports (67 reports less than last year); 151 reports were screened and investigated. In December 2020, there remained 46 children in foster care. 43% of the children in foster care were five years old and under, 28% were ages six through twelve years, 22% were teenagers and 7% were youth 18 years and older participating in the 18-21 program.

The CCPT hosted a hot cars event, alongside Safe Kids Riverbend Coalition at Piggly Wiggly in Williamston. Also, the team assisted with sponsorship for foster kids for Christmas. There were a large amount of donations this year. Ms. Conner stated staff has still had to go into homes for investigations. DSS did endure a COVID cluster which did pose challenges, along with a large number of children in foster care.

There were no questions from the Board.

OLD BUSINESS -- None

NEW BUSINESS

Solid Waste Availability Fee Appeal

Ms. Winifred Williams came before the Board to discuss a refund request for a solid waste availability fee. She stated her dwelling only had 1 solid waste container for the 2020 tax year. Ms. Williams received a listing/abstract form in January 2020 giving her a notice of the value and availability fees for the property for the upcoming 2020 tax year with a notification of a 30-day appeal period. There were no appeals filed for that address.

Ms. Williams consulted with the Tax Assessor's office in December 2020 to discuss the solid waste availability fee. The Tax Assessor's office denied her request for the release of the fee based on the reasoning that the appeal was untimely and there were two solid waste cans on the property at one point in time. A picture was provided to the Board for review. Ms. Williams was not satisfied with the denial decision and wanted it appealed to the Board of Commissioners. The Tax Assessor's office had just re-inspected the property for the additional can, which was now gone, and would be charged for one can in 2021.

Ms. Williams called in to the meeting to address her concerns with the Board of Commissioners. She was requesting the \$172 fee be removed from her tax statement, as she did not have two trashcans. She stated the man that lived there before her had two trashcans. Chairman Smith stated there was a picture in the agenda packet that showed two trashcans at the address in question. He stated he spoke to Ms. Williams one day at the Governmental Center, and she told him her story. She explained she bought the house many years ago. He asked Ms. Williams to take a

picture of the home and send to him. The picture revealed that the packet picture was many years old, and he explained there had been many renovations to the current home.

Chairman Smith stated he believed Ms. Williams and the picture that she sent; indicating he felt she only had one trashcan at her residence. Chairman Smith passed his phone around to the Board for all of the Commissioners to review the new picture. He confirmed that Ms. Williams was asking for release of the \$172 from the 2020 tax year. She had been paying the fee for many years but she was unaware of that.

Chairman Smith stated the Board would not vote on this release at this meeting. He asked Ms. Williams when she bought her house. She could not remember the date but said it was “two thousand and something”. Ms. Williams stated she did not own the house during the time that the picture in the agenda packet was taken.

Ms. Williams stated she won an award for an improvement award from the Town of Williamston due to her property improvements.

Chairman Smith stated, “We will take another look at it”, and look at the general statutes to see how they could fix the problem. He stated she should be able to get the taxes back for 2020 because she did not have two trashcans.

Ms. Williams thanked the Board for their consideration.

Approval of Grant Administrator for CDBG-CV Program

County Manager Bennett stated Martin County received \$900,000 in the CDBG-CV grant, and as a part of the program, a grant administrator was needed. Martin County issued a request for proposals to establish a contract with an experienced CDBG grant administrator. The County received two bids. After review of the proposals, staff recommended The Wooten Company as the grant administrator for the CDBG-CV grant.

County Manager Bennett stated the administration fee would be around 8% (around \$69,000), which was fairly low. Staff was asking the Board to approve The Wooten Company as the CDBG-CV Grant Administrator.

Chairman Smith stated Martin County had a great relationship with The Wooten Company over the years.

Commissioner Gurganus made a MOTION to approve The Wooten Company as the CDBG-CV grant administrator. Commissioner Ayers asked if The Wooten Company had the lowest bid. County Manager Bennett stated they were selected as the lowest bidder. Chairman Smith stated he was not familiar with the other company that submitted a bid. Vice Chairman Bond made a SECOND. The Board APPROVED the motion unanimously.

Chairman Smith stated this was another step in the process of the getting the funds available, but that it would still take time. He reiterated CADA would be doing screenings for applicants. Chairman Smith thanked LFNC Fellow Elizabeth Mitchell for her help in the grant application process.

Approval of Audit Contract

County Manager Bennett stated Martin County had been working with Carr, Riggs and Ingram as the auditors for an extended period. The finance office had done a tremendous job with writing and publishing the CAFR each year. Writing the CAFR had become more and more complex over the years with added GASB (Governmental Accounting Standards Board) statements and GFOA (Governmental Finance Officers Association) requirements to qualify for the Certificate of Achievement award each year.

The proposed audit would reflect an increase of \$3,950 (total of \$43,400), which would allow the auditing firm to complete the audit and compose the CAFR for Martin County. Mr. Bennett stated the amount paid was the 10th lowest in the state.

Staff requested the Board approve the audit contract with the increase for CRI to compose the CAFR.

Chairman Smith stated processes for completing audits and reporting to the LGC were the same for all governments, no matter their size. He stated having the auditor complete the CAFR to help the finance staff was a good idea.

Commissioner Ayers made a MOTION to approve the audit contract as presented with Carr, Riggs and Ingram, with a SECOND from Commissioner Biggs. The Board APPROVED the motion unanimously.

Budget Amendment(s) -- None

BOARD REPORTS / COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Chairman Smith spoke about the upcoming NACo Legislative Conference in March 2021, stating it was via a virtual platform.

Commissioner Ayers expressed his concerns about the upcoming budget retreat on February 24th and 25th, 2021. He stated the retreat would be out of compliance with the Governor's 10 people rule. He stated there had just been some new cases in the courthouse. To get all department heads, staff, and other staff in one area is a cause for concern. In addition, there are two speakers coming in from out of the area that could increase the risks. Commissioner Ayers requested the Board re-think the retreat; maybe even consider a virtual platform, stating it was an unnecessary risk to take on.

County Manager Bennett thanked Commissioner Ayers for his comments. He stated all of the department heads would not be there at once, and there would not be more than ten people in the room at the same time. Mr. Bennett stated there was some staff that would be joining virtually. Mr. Bennett stated he reached out to UNC School of Government and was told government meetings were excluded from the 10 person limit, and as long as everyone has a mask and maintains social distancing, "we should be fine" as long as enough space is available, and hand sanitizers/masks are available. County Manager Bennett explained measures that had been taken, also stated one of the speakers would be present virtually.

County Manager Bennett stated he needed to know the decision of the Board to let the speakers know if any changes were needed.

Commissioner Ayers asked if all department heads would be required to be together for one speaker, and County Manager Bennett stated no, the department heads would come in at their assigned time on the schedule to make their presentation. Commissioner Ayers asked if the department heads would actually be making their budget presentation at the retreat. County Manager Bennett stated the budget presentations would look different from in years past, stating the presentations would include accomplishments over the past year, any goals for the upcoming fiscal year, and any resources needed to accomplish their goals. The second day of the retreat would include time for the Board to discuss any budget concerns or goals. After that, the County Manager and Finance Officer would meet with each department head to discuss the budget. Then, the department heads would come to the Board discuss their budget needs. This would give the Board an opportunity to see what exactly it was the departments were asking for.

Commissioner Ayers spoke of budget presentation meetings that are typically scheduled during the budget process and asked if this retreat was being used as a “jump start” to the budget process, and if those scheduled meetings would still take place. County Manager Bennett stated, “You probably won’t have no more than one workshop to clean it up”. Bennett reiterated he and Finance Officer Ange would work with the department heads to finalize a budget request to present to the Board for approval. Commissioner Ayers thanked Mr. Bennett for his goal to get through the budget without a tax increase. County Manager Bennett stated he had never had a tax increase in his experience.

Commissioner Gurganus stated as employers, when it is made mandatory for people to gather, if someone got sick, he was concerned about any risk and liability. IF someone had a concern, he would ask that it be made available virtually. County Manager Bennett stated there had been 2 or 3 departments that had requested to participate virtually. County Manager Bennett stated there was only one confirmed case of COVID in the courthouse as of now, and there were more employees being tested the next day. He stated there were steps being taken to not spread COVID. He reported the Register of Deeds office was closed for at least three days, pending test results. The finance office did not have any confirmed cases of COVID, but precautions were being taken pending test results. Mr. Bennett ensured the safety of employees and citizens with proper precautions.

Commissioner Ayers echoed Commissioner Gurganus’ comments, stating no one should be required to be there. Commissioner Ayers asked Clerk Godard if the retreat could be made available virtually. Clerk Godard stated she and IT Director Jeb Gardner were working on that, due to Moratoc Park not being set up for virtual platforms. This was due to no internet, no microphones, etc. at the Moratoc Park building. Commissioner Ayers recommend:ed phone connection if needed.

Chairman Smith stated he was just as concerned about the health of the citizens and employees. He stated at this time, there were more than 10 people present at the meeting. Chairman Smith stated we have a small county, compared to counties such as Mecklenburg and Wake County, and they have more than 10 people because of the size of the facility. Chairman Smith stated in order to carry out local government duties, more than 10 people was necessary. He said safety was the number one concern, but stated the retreat was necessary for budgeting and for bonding. He stated there was lots of room at the Moratoc Park to keep people separated enough safely. He stated he

did not want each department head to participate virtually unless there was a health concern. He encouraged people to participate with what was planned and use precautions.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Vice Chairman Bond made a MOTION to adjourn the meeting, with a SECOND from Commissioner Biggs. Chairman Smith adjourned the meeting at 9:09 p.m. The next regular meeting would be held on Wednesday, March 10, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Boardroom.

Ronnie Smith, Chairman

Jessica Godard, Clerk to the Board