

March 17, 2021
March 18, 2021 (only if needed)

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session, Departments/Office Holders Budget Presentations, on Wednesday, March 17th, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom of 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, County Manager James Bennett, Deputy County Clerk to the Board Marion B. Thompson, Finance Officer Cindy Ange, Sheriff Tim Manning, and IT Director Jeb Gardner.

Commissioner David "Skip" Gurganus was not in attendance, due to not feeling well.

Present via Cisco WebEx: Bear Grass Mayor Charlotte Griffin.

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

Commissioner Smith extended a welcome to all, while also thanking the Board members, Sheriff Manning, County Manager Bennett and staff for participating and making presentations during the Planning and Budgeting Retreat held at the Moratoc Park Building on February 24th - 25th, 2021.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Vice Chairman Bond made a MOTION to approve the agenda as presented, with a SECOND by Commissioner Biggs. The motion was unanimously APPROVED. (4-0)

DEPARTMENTS/OFFICE HOLDERS BUDGET PRESENTATIONS

County Manager Bennett thanked each department/office holder for their willingness to work together to make cost cuts in the FY 2021-2022 budget without diminishing the level of service to the Martin County citizens. The proposed budget included a 2% COLA increase, life insurance increased from \$10,000 to \$15,000, and a reduction in cost for pre-65 health insurance.

Finance would be adding other expenses to the departmental budgets as these figures become available.

Water Districts: Water District Manager Ed Warren noted decreases for Water Districts #1 & #2 for travel, telephone, vehicle repairs, testing supplies and utilities. District Manager Warren budget request included a one-half cost-share with Maintenance for a dump truck.

Cooperative Extension: County Extension Director, Beaufort & Interim County Extension Director, Martin Rod Gurganus stated the budget request for Martin County Cooperative Extension included decreases in office supplies, telephone, and postage.

Interim CED Gurganus asked the Board to consider contributing to the reinstatement of a position for Small Farms Agent, vacated when Agent Cecil Sumner retired. Interim CED Gurganus explained that back in the day, this position was fully funded by the university. The current model for the same position was 50% by the university and 50% by the county. In his role as Beaufort County Co-op Extension Director, Interim CED Gurganus stated he was looking for a 4-H agent. NC State recommended sharing the cost, due to budget restraints. With this model NC State would pay 50%, Martin County, as the home base office, 30%, and Beaufort County 20%. The agent would be in Martin County three days a week and Beaufort County two days a week. The approximate cost to Martin County was stated to be \$15,000. If funded, the position would not start unit January 1st, 2022.

Chairman Smith commended Interim CED Gurganus for hiring 4-H Agent Desmond Miller. Adding, he had heard good things in the community.

County Manager Bennett commented Martin County was waiting to see what Beaufort County would do regarding the reinstatement of the Small Farms position.

Register of Deeds: Register of Deeds Kimberly Griffin stated her budget included decreases in postage, computer indexing, dues & subscriptions and automation enhancement. Register of Deeds Griffin commented she asked for a full-time position, because of e-recording effective April 1st, 2021 but was told this would not be possible. Instead, ROD Griffin asked for a raise for a part-time employee, who had not had a raise in six years.

County Manager Bennett replied unfortunately, the FY 2021-2022 budget did not include raises for any part-time employees. Adding, if the board approved, there would be some things to compensate to some degrees.

Commissioner Ayers questioned why some department requests were less than the manager recommended amounts. Finance Officer Ange explained there were some benefits expenses and costs added or needed to be added that the Departments/Office Holders did not have the figures for.

Elections: Elections Director Kristy Modlin stated decreases in board member expense, which resulted in a decrease in social security expenses. Election Director Modlin budgeted for three elections – March primary, 2nd primary, and the November Municipal election. Election Director Modlin stated because of the 2020 Census, all elections for this fiscal year might be moved. Adding, the March primary may be moved to May, due to redistricting. Election Director Modlin commented her salary increase of 2.2%, which was requested by the Elections Board in last year's budget but denied, was included in this year's budget plus the proposed 2% COLA.

County Manager Bennett stated the 2.2% requested increase was included in the proposed budget, subject to the approval of the Board.

Tax Collector: Tax Collector Christie Belvins reported the budget requests remained the same or slight decreased.

Department of Motor Vehicles-License Plates Agency: Tax Collector Christie Blevins stated the DMV traffic had increased tremendously with the closure of other DMV offices. Many fixed expenses did not allow cuts to the DMV budget.

Tax Assessor: Tax Assessor Elisha Hardison stated the Tax Assessor Office budget requests reflected decreases for contracted services, travel, telephone, and software/programming with slight increases in some line items beyond her control, such as gap billing. Although not in this budget, Tax Assessor Hardison asked the Board keep in mind pictometry imaging in the near future.

Veterans' Service: Veterans Director Theodosia Robinson asked the Board to remember the comments about Veterans, the goods and services they provide, as well as the tax revenue for the County. Director Robinson stated renovations were being done to the building that houses Veterans' Service or projects have been completed.

Adult & Aging Services Department: AASD Director Lisa Edmonds presented a budget with cuts in some area but should be able to absorb the 2% COLA, which should have little or no effects on level of services. AASD Director Lisa Edmonds stated bids would not be necessary for food delivery in the upcoming budget, as there was another year left on the present contract. AASD was utilizing the same food delivery services the Sheriff's Office.

Social Services: DSS/Transit Director Angela Ellis stated the DSS budget had been trimmed as much as possible, approximately \$311,000. No new positions were requested, although much of the budget would be COVID-19 driven.

Commissioner Ayers commended DSS/Transit Director Ellis on the cuts in DSS. Adding, the cuts were a tremendous help. That he was always worried about the County's high expenses in DSS. Stating, the cuts showed he was correct, the County was spending too much money in DSS.

DSS/Transit Director Ellis reminded all DSS was promised if the need arose she could come back for more funding from the County.

Transit: DSS/Transit Director Angela Ellis stated the Transit budget, much like the budget for DSS, was cut as much as possible, approximately \$26,000. The budget included one grant request and one rollover grant from FY2020-2021.

Soil and Water Conservation: S & W Supervisor Lynn Whitehurst apologetically stated his budget request reflected an increase. The Soil and Water Conservation Board realized the department would be operating at a 2 ½% pre-cut level, mainly due to COVID, if left at the same level. As COVID restrictions lessen, training, travel and things of that nature would increase. S & W Supervisor Whitehurst stated some of the requested increase would be funded with the \$3,600 funding received from the state.

Public Works: Public Works Director Justin Harrison presented the budget requests for the buildings and grounds listed below maintained by his department.

Government Building (built 1982)
Old Agriculture Extension Building

County Office Building
Health Department Building

Farmer's Market
Kehukee Park (built mid-'90's)
Watts Street Building
PSAP Building

Moratoc Park
Shooting Range Building
Ray Street Building
Water Maintenance Building

As Public Works Director Harrison reviewed the proposed budget for Public Works, he stated for the last 8 years. The County had done well in renovating the buildings, such as remodeling, new roofs, and new air conditioner units. At this point, Public Work buildings were sitting pretty good but Public Works Director Harrison cautioned against letting the guard down. Stating, there was room for improvement still in some building. Air conditioning was considered for the Farmer's Market but was ruled too expensive due to the need for 3 phase voltage. Public Works Director Harrison opted to improve ventilation instead.

Landfill: Before presenting the Landfill budget, Public Works Director Justin Harrison passed out literature to inform the Board about an ongoing issue – tire tax revenue being set to counties was not covering the cost to recycle tires.

The North Carolina Legislature changed the appropriation to the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR) for the 2013-2015 biennium for the scrap tire disposal program. The change was enacted through G.S. 130A-309.6, an amendment to the Portion of Scrap Tire Disposal Tax credited to general fund and Repeal Scrap Tire Disposal Account Section 14.16(A) G.S. 105-87.19B. This action reallocated Tire disposal Fee revenue, including the transferal of 30% of the net proceeds. The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) is now underfunded for the continued support of cost overrun grant funds for individual counties to manage scrap tire disposal, as only 70% of the tire disposal fees collected are distributed to the counties on a per capita basis.

Public Works Director Harrison asked for the Board' support in any way to lessen the burden on the County through talks with legislators in Raleigh.

Public Works Director Harrison reviewed the Landfill budget line items. Plans were to proceed with the three dumpsters for the Convenient Center at a fraction of the cost originally anticipated. Consumer safety was the major driving force of this project.

Communication/911: Telecommunications Director Jason Steward stated his budget was largely unchanged. Adding, a myriad of efficiencies had been discovered thanks to IT and some other departments. The current Communications facility was being operated at almost the same cost as the prior location. Director Steward commented the budget had been reduced by approximately \$16,000 or 2 ½% of the FY2020-2021 Budget. There was a major reduction in radio maintenance line item, due to the state allowing radio maintenance inside the 911 facility to be billed to the 911 fund. Also, the interim backup facility on Meadow Road was no longer being maintained, thus providing a reduction in cost. The former primary 911 center on the ground floor of the Martin County Governmental Center became the back-up in October 2019.

County Manager Bennett noted during the Planning & Budget Retreat Director Steward had requested two (2) new employees, which didn't quite make the budget. After discussion with County Manager

Bennett and Finance Officer Ange, Director Steward planned to include one new employee in FY 2022-2023 Budget.

Inspections: Inspections Code Enforcer Director Griffin stated the Inspections' budget had been cut in all the ways possible. An increase in the budget was requested for an Inspections apprentice position, with a salary of \$30,000/yr. plus benefits. Director Griffin added very few are interested in taking the level of training and testing necessary for this (high skilled) position.

County Manager Bennett added Director Griffin had made this request in order to train someone before his impending retirement in a few years.

Emergency Management: Safety Administrator/Director Jody Griffin stated a storage shelter requested was not seen favorable for this fiscal year. There was an increase in the line item amount for 911 addressing due to theft of signs and damage caused by seasonal road maintenance. Sheriff Tim Manning stated legislation was already in place to address theft and damage of road signs.

Data Processing: Information Technology Director Jeb Gardner reported a 13.5% decrease or roughly \$56,944 in the data processing budget for FY2021-2022. Director Gardner recommended discontinuing contract services for information technology. Instead, hire a full-time employee, with a salary of \$40,000/yr. plus benefits. This individual would work five (5) days/week versus the contractor working three (3) days/week and would have a vested interest in the County.

IT Director Gardner reported funding from COVID-19 was used to replace laptops. Thus, freeing up FY2020-2021 department funding for other expenditures. Adding, the Board has previously approved the anti-virus renewal increase, which was included in the budget for FY2021-2022.

Sheriff: Sheriff Tim Manning commented on cuts in different line items. Increases were noted in training expenses and the server for body camera storage. The purchase of six (6) cars was included. Sheriff Manning commended Lt. Ryan Smith for helping to keep the vehicle maintenance line item at an even level year to year by doing in-house maintenance on vehicle repairs at a minimum cost to the County.

Sheriff Manning reminded the Board of the need to budget for courthouse security – one point entry, while stressing the need for security in the courthouse 24/7. Letters of support for courthouse security have been received from Chief Judges for Superior and District Court as well as Martin County Clerk of Court.

Finance: Finance Officer Cindy Ange apologized for not being able to cut the Finance budget more and for increases in certain line items. Some of the increase had already been approval or approval was anticipated by the Board – the 2% COLA proposed, prior approval for the increase in audit cost for the auditor to do more work and the \$5,500 for GSAB-87 software. There were decreases to line items for other professional services, office supplies and travel.

County Manager/Commissioners: County Manager Bennett stated the budget for County Manager, which included the Clerk to the Board/Executive Assistant had some areas of reduction, although the overall budget reflected an increase.

When comparing the budget for FY2020-2021 to the proposed budget for FY2021-2022, the Commissioners' budget showed a decrease.

County Manager Bennett shared with the Board of Commissioners the proposed rate changes below:

Rate Changes Proposal	Current	Proposed	Deposit
¾ tap	\$ 550.00	\$ 600.00	
Moratoc Building rental	\$ 400.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 100.00
Barnes House	\$.00	\$ 125.00	\$ 75.00
Other Changes Proposal			
Stop Compensatory Time for salary (exempt) employees			
Stop Flex time – grandfather in current employees			
Stop work from home			
Currently, total amount spent for meals is reimbursed when receipts are presented.			
Per diem- meals	Current-DSS	Previous-DSS	Proposed
Breakfast	\$ 10.00	\$ 8.00	\$ 10.00
Lunch	\$ 15.00	\$ 11.00	\$ 15.00
Dinner	\$ 25.00	\$ 16.00	\$ 25.00
Total	\$ 50.00	\$ 35.00	\$ 50.00

County Manager Bennett also shared the proposed budget for the Martin County Airport. During its last meeting, the Airport Commission recommended an increase in contractual services, due to the eighteen (18) additional acres to be mowed and maintained. A percentage of new rentals was proposed for Juliet Aviation as an incentive to attract business to the Airport.

County Manager Bennett stated overall, the budget reflected a decrease. The proposed budget included life insurance increased amounts from \$10,000 to \$15,000 for a lesser cost, and a substantial reduction in cost for pre-65 health insurance.

The Commissioners' meeting for Department/Office Holder Presentations, March 18th, 2021 was not necessary and would not be held.

COMMENTS

County Manager Bennett commended the staff on their efforts on the FY 2021-2022 budget. Adding, the County was fortunate to have the level of staff it has.

Vice Chairman Bond thanked the County Manager, Employees, all Department Heads/Directors for their efforts put forth with this budget.

Commissioner Ayers stated all and all he was pleased with the budget. Commissioner Ayers commended County Manager Bennett, Finance Officer Ange, and all Department Heads/Directors on a good job. Adding, they had been very gracious and helpful in this process. Commissioner Ayers extended thanks to the whole staff.

Commissioner Biggs thanked all Department Heads/Directors, as well. Commissioner Biggs stated when you look at navigating a budget, no one wants to have to cut but we cut. And, do it for the best interest of the County; that's commendable.

Chairman Smith commented on having observed County Manager Bennett and Finance Officer Ange at times from afar, during budget meetings with Department Heads/Directors; how a grassroots approach was used to solicit ideas for those carrying out the day to day tasks; how the expectations of the Board was established for the beginning with the Staff and how the goal was to get others to buy into the vision. Chairman Smith thanked the entire staff. Adding, they (the entire staff) made the Board's job easier. Chairman Smith commented he did not see a tax increase for FY2021-2022. Stating, there would be a tax increase only if there was no other recourse.

Chairman Smith assured Sheriff Manning of his support of the one-point entry to the Courthouse. Chairman Smith thanked Martin County outside agencies for their support, speaking of how blessed Martin County is to have agencies that will work together.

Commissioner Ayers reiterated his support of one-point entry. Adding, the goal could be accomplished with a simpler approach and less expensive than the model originally talked about. Commissioner Ayers also cautioned outside agencies to be prepared for cuts. To get ready with sharp pencils.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Commissioner Ayers made a MOTION to adjourn the meeting, with a SECOND by Vice Chairman Bond. The Board unanimously APPROVED the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m. (4-0)

Ronnie Smith, Chairman

Marion B. Thompson,
Deputy Clerk to the Board