

March 24, 2021

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session, Outside Agency Presentations, on Wednesday, March 24, 2021, 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' Board Room 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, Commissioner David "Skip" Gurganus, 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.

Present via Cisco Webex: Outside Agencies Representatives

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

Commissioner Smith extended a welcome to citizens and those attending virtually.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Chairman Smith requested a motion to approve the agenda with the inclusion of the followings:

- 1A. Appointments to Martin County Regional Water and Sewer Authority (MCRWASA) Board - County Manager James Bennett (Board member) and Commissioner Dempsey Bond, Jr. (Alternate board member)
- 1B. NC East Alliance - Letter of Support for grant funding for Broadband and I-87

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

Appointments to MCRWASA

County Manager Bennett would be replacing former County Manager David Bone on the MCRWASA Board. Commissioner Bond, who served temporary as a MCRWASA board member until a county manager could be appointed to the board, would become an alternate MCRWASA board member.

Commissioner Ayers made the MOTION to appoint County Manager James Bennett (MCRWASA Board member) and Commissioner Dempsey Bond, Jr. (MCRWASA Alternate board member), with a SECOND by Commissioner Gurganus. The motion was unanimously APPROVED. (5-0)

Approve NC East Alliance Letter of Support - Broadband & I-87

In a message received by email, NC East Alliance explained its push for federal rural infrastructure funding for the completion of I-87 since September, 2020. Stating, the NC

Department of Transportation (NCDOT) submitted an application for federal INFRA grant funding for the completion of I-87 (179 miles). This application also included broadband along the I-87 corridor, and down the US 64 roadway to the beach. NC East Alliance was asking that letters of support to be sent to NC DOT and US Department of Transportation (US DOT) by April 2nd, 2021.

County Manager Bennett recommended and sought the Board approval to submit the letter of support. Commissioner Gurganus made the MOTION to approve submittal of the letter of support for Broadband and I-87 to DOT, with a SECOND by Commissioner Ayers. The motion was unanimously APPROVED. (5-0)

BUDGET PRESENTATIONS – OUTSIDE AGENCIES

Several outside agencies submitted budget requests to Martin County for FY 2021-2022. The following outside agencies requested a place holder on the agenda to present individual requests to the Board via Crisco Webex.

Highway 17/64 Association

Executive Director Marc Finlayson, of the Highway 17/64 Association, stated the Highway 17/64 Association greatly appreciated the support from Martin County over the years. For fiscal year 2021-2022, the Association asked for a contribution of \$10,000.

Executive Director Finlayson recognized former County Manager David Bone, who was the Martin County representative and also served as Chairman of the Association on Highway 17/64 Association and Commissioner Dempsey Bond as the RPO Chairman. Executive Director Finlayson asked the Board to designate someone else as the official representative.

Executive Director Finlayson stated NCDOT faced many budget challenges and impacts to its operation. Over \$1 Billion in costs were associated with hurricane damage and MAP Act settlements. The COVID-19 shutdown in spring of 2020 severely curtailed travel and greatly diminished gasoline tax revenues. Thus, the revenue shortage and cash flow problems caused operations and maintenance activities to be scaled back and capital projects in the STIP to be delayed. However, House Bill #77 gave NCDOT a cash lifeline and changed its budget and spending accountability.

Executive Director Finlayson reported the project important to Martin County, (R-2511) Washington Bypass at Old Ford to four-lane south of Williamston, was programmed, funded (\$85.1 million), right-of-way underway, and should be constructed in 2021. Updates were given on other major projects, as well.

Martin Community Players

President Joe B. Griffin, Jr., of the Martin Community Players, thanked the Board for its past generosity in funding. For fiscal year 2021-2022, the requested continual funding was in the amount of \$14,000.

President Griffin spoke of being in the early stages of creating a summer outreach program-specifically, a multi-week “drama camp” geared towards elementary and primary school students

of Martin County. The goal was to enlighten the diverse population of children but also make it affordable for their parents. President Griffin encouraged youth participation. Additionally, the “*Sound of Music*”, originally scheduled for March of 2020 was scheduled to take place on December 1st – 5th, 2021 at Martin County Auditorium.

For over forty years, the Martin Community Players has made it their mission to create quality theatrical productions for the citizens of eastern North Carolina. Martin Community Players is a non-profit organization that relies on financial contributions to keep Theatre Arts alive in Martin County for a long time to come.

Food Bank of the Albemarle

Executive Director Liz Reasoner, of the Food Bank of the Albemarle (FBA), thanked the Board for the support received in past years. The appropriation requested for fiscal year 2021-2022 (\$4,000) would enable FBA to provide approximately 20,000 pounds of food or the equivalent of more than 16,666 meals.

FBA serves the county distributing food through Back Swamp Church of Christ, Bibleway Project Relief, Faith Community Outreach, Inc., Full Gospel Way of the Cross, Friends of God Ministries, Liberty Christian Center Food Pantry, Martin Council on Aging, and Unlimited Care. According to the latest data from Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap report, 19.7% of the overall county population was considered food insecure including children (29.4%).

During the most recent fiscal year, 2019/2020, FBA served an average of 3,030 Martin County residents each month. FBA provided 559,298 meals to hungry residents of Martin County. The Annual meal gap hovers at 254,102 meals still needed to ensure that no one goes hungry.

Chairman Smith, present President of North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC), chose “Food Insecurities” as his initiative for his tenure to highlight the apparent need in this area.

Boys & Girls Club of the Coastal Plains

Chief Operating Officer Andrea Nix, of the Martin County Unit of the Boys & Girls Club of the Coastal Plains, thanked the Board for supporting the Boys & Girls Clubs in Martin County. CCO Nix was accompanied by Branch Manager Sonya Howell. The Board of Commissioners was asked to consider a continued allocation of \$25,000 for fiscal year 2021-2022. The funding would support the Robersonville and Williamston Boys & Girls Clubs.

CCO Nix updated the Board on current operations, services, and post-COVID-19 provisions provided at the Martin County Centers. In Martin County alone, both Boys & Girls Clubs serve more than 250 young people each year, with more than 120 attending daily, both in-person and virtually.

In celebration, CCO Nix announced Mr. Javion Andrews, South Creek High School student, had been selected as “2021 Youth of the Year” winner.

Chairman Smith noted Vice Chairman Bond and he have served as Martin County Boys & Girls Clubs Board members, from day one, and commended the organization on making a difference in the lives of children.

Martin Community College

President Wesley Beddard presented the budget request, which was slightly less than last year's allocation. For fiscal year 2021-2022, the College requested \$1,026,250 for current operating expenses and \$60,000 for capital outlay.

President Beddard noted MCC general administration cost, mainly legal fees were expected to be lower. However, plant operations and maintenance cost were expected to increase for the next fiscal year. Bond funds have helped with renovation costs and helped to reduce plant operating expenses over the past year. President Beddard stated he anticipated a wage increase for state funded employees and planned to extend the increase to county funded employees at the college.

New programs started this year were Line Technician Academy and Fire Academy. New program proposed for 2021-2022 school year were AA in Teacher Preparation, AS in Teacher Preparation, Applied Engineering Technology, Manicuring/Nail Technician, Public Safety Administration, Orthopedic Technology and EMS Academy.

County Manager Bennett inquired about the American Rescue Plan funding to be received and its impact on MCC budget. President Beddard responded of the amount expected (approximately \$719,000), about one half would go directly to students and the rest for services for students.

President Beddard thanked the Board for its consideration and continued support of Martin Community College and its efforts.

Martin County Arts Council

Chair Kathy Daly, of the Martin County Arts Council, thanked the Board of Commissioners for its continued support in carrying out its mission. Chair Daly stated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic had limited their ability to hold larger in-person events this year, but they had been able to transition to holding virtual and smaller in-person shows and exhibits in a safe environment. MCAC requested the Board allocate the amount of \$8,500 for FY 2021-2022.

In addition to sponsoring several virtual shows and exhibits as well as in-house exhibits for each artist, with a limited number of family and friends, MCC established a virtual on-line market to assist Martin County artists in selling their works.

Chair Daly added the Martin County Arts Council Flatiron building was for rent. Also, Chair Daly mentioned there being a store local inside the building as well.

Roanoke River Partners

Chair Charlotte Griffin, of Roanoke River Partners, Inc. accompanied by Board member Jerry McCrary, began by thanking the Board of Commissioners for their longtime support and partnership. Chair Griffin requested \$1,000 for fiscal year 2021-2022, same as last year.

Chair Griffin stated the work and collaboration between Roanoke River Partners and five (5) NC counties including fifteen (15) towns within these counties continue to attract an ever growing number of visitors with diverse and multifaceted interests to the Roanoke River, the surrounding natural and cultural resources; and the small towns that populate the Roanoke River region. Roanoke River Partners planned to continue to collaborate with a number of state and national partners to find ways to attract additional visitors and new economic opportunities to Martin County and to the entire region.

Roanoke Partners also planned to continue to develop and promote the five-county paddle trail and camping platforms as well as work to support the renovation of Martin County's historic Hamilton Rosenwald School, which remains one of their top priorities.

Chair Griffin noted the Roanoke River Partners received a \$15,000 award from the Barnes Foundation (Martin County) – \$5,000 would be used for a new RRP website. The remaining \$10,000 was earmarked for the Hamilton Rosenwald School/Roanoke River Underground Railroad (RR-UGRR) Trial projects, per the Barnes Foundation stipulation.

Economic Development Corporation (EDC)

On behalf of the Martin County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) Board, President/CEO Jason Semple thanked the County for its past support of its efforts to further the economic well-being of Martin County. The Martin County Economic Development Corporation requested appropriation for FY 2021-2022 for operating expenses was \$151,288 which represented a reduction of \$2,773.

EDC President/CEO Semple stated through the combined efforts of all partners since 2011, investments total \$253 million, jobs created or retained total 1,495 and grants or low interest loans total \$18,515,000.

In addition to the NC Rail & Commerce Park and Jamesville Greenfield site, EDC President/CEO Semple added MCEDC would continue to market its two primary available industrial buildings, the former Carolina Store Fixtures and Big City Gyros facilities. Ongoing marketing was in place for the HTM building on NC 125, owned by Martin Enterprises, for projects looking to lease industrial space. The former Parkdale facility was being utilized by third party logistics company Crown LSP of Rocky Mount.

EDC President/CEO Semple stated the MCEDC would continue to market directly to potential customers as well as leverage its relationship with the statewide Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, NC Department of Commerce, the NC East Alliance, the North Carolina Railroad and CSX to garner additional exposure.

Martin-Tyrrell-Washington District Health Department

Health Director Wes Gray, of the Martin-Tyrrell-Washington District Health Department, accompanied by Deputy Health Director Vickey Manning, thanked the Board for its continued support in helping to provide public health services to the residents. M-T-W District Health Department provides the following programs: Food and lodging, Environmental Health, Communicable Disease/STD/HIV Control, Emergency Preparedness, Immunization, Child Health, WIC Client Services/Nutrition/Peer, Medical Assistance, and other services.

Health Director Gray discussed the impact COVID-19 has had on the operations of M-T-W District Health Department. At the time of the meeting, approximately 95% of the staff remained on COVID-19 duties.

Health Director Gray provided a comparison chart of FY 2019 local health departments or districts expenditures and percentage of funding. Health Director Gray was proud to report that M-T-W District Department was 2nd in the value of services provided to the counties in its district by keeping local appropriations low. Health Director Gray commended the Health Board for keeping cost extremely low for the counties.

Health Director Gray stated the M-T-W District Board of Health voted to request the same baseline amount per capita from all counties (Martin, Tyrrell and Washington) for FY2020-2021, with an additional 10% increase for each county to support Roanoke Home Care, as M-T-W District Health Department adjust to the new Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services reimbursement model. Martin County's share of this request would be \$416,006 for FY 2021-2022.

Center for Family Violence Prevention

Outreach Director Sandra Rhodes, accompanied by full-time board Advocate Brianna Ipock, stated during the calendar year of 2020, the support provided by the Martin County Commissioners enabled the Center for Family Violence Prevention to provide crisis intervention, counseling, and outreach to 51 victims of domestic violence in Martin County. For fiscal year 2021-2022, Ms. Rhodes requested the continued level of funding totaling \$3,750 to support the operational costs of the Martin County office. Outreach Director Rhodes thanked the Board for all its does for Martin County and its citizens.

From January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020, Outreach Director Rhodes reported the Center for Family Violence Prevention served 51 victims of domestic violence, provided 38 referrals out of community resources and services, 393 case management services, 266 safety planning sessions, and 244 counseling sessions.

Outreach Director Rhodes stated the Coordinated Community Response Team, consisting of law enforcement, Department of Social Services, Martin County court personnel and other agencies continue to work together to assist victims of domestic violence in the Martin County community.

Ms. Rhodes shared a success story about one client, who had now completed a four year degree and was moving out of public housing to their own home.

BHM Regional Library

Executive Director Patrick Fitzgerald thanked the Board for its continued commitment and support. The appropriation requested for fiscal year 2021-2022 was \$105,904, which would be a modest increase of \$1,170. The division of regional expenses paid with county funds amounted to .50 per capita.

Director Fitzgerald discussed some of the programs offered at the library – eBooks, the hot spot program and the student access program. Plans were to increase community outreach through the use of mobile units, taking into consideration COVID-19 guidelines for safety.

Choanoke Area Development Association (CADA)

CADA Executive Director Sallie Surface thanked the Board for the opportunity and for its support of the programs and outreach that CADA continues to administer in Martin County. For fiscal year 2021-2022, CADA asked for \$30,000. Funding has allowed CADA to continue to provide services during the Pandemic, to leverage additional resources and to implement new service delivery methods while protecting applicants and staff.

Executive Director Surface stated continued funding support from Martin County has allowed CADA to continue to offer program opportunities such as CSBG Self-Sufficiency, Homeownership Counseling, Weatherization and the Urgent Repair Program, to implement Essential Single Family Rehab funding (\$175,000) and to leverage other funds/resources, such as Dominion EnergyShare (\$169,000), Dominion Energy Weatherization (\$42,000), CARES CSBG (\$74,674), Duke Endowment (\$5,000 to date), Blue Cross/Blue Shield Healthy Homes Initiative and NC Relators Relief Fund (\$2,000). Executive Director Surface commented that little or no funding for administration was provided for these program. Assistance from Martin County had helped with the administration cost.

Executive Director Surface shared an update on a Father who was working with the Small Business Center to apply for CARES PPP funds and was taking virtual classes. The Mother continued to seek employment. CADA would continue to assist this family to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic.

Chairman Smith commended Mr. Roy Moore for positive feedback from clients regarding his interaction with them. Chairman Smith commended Executive Director Surface on her years of service to CADA and impending retirement effective June 30, 2021. Executive Director Surface commented on her thirty eight years with CADA and about maybe becoming a consultant with special projects.

Executive Director Surface commended Mr. Roy Moore, CADA employee, and credited him with administering funds to some 372 families, on behalf of CADA.

COMMENTS

Throughout the meeting, the Commissioners took the opportunity to thank the representatives of the various agencies and their staff for their contribution to the community.

Chairman Smith assured the outside agencies of continued support at some level from Martin County.

Commissioner Ayers stated he commented last meeting that in-house agencies had done a good job of holding the line. Commissioner Ayers added he wanted to take care of in-house first. Commissioner Ayers commented although there were not many increases, there was only one small increase mentioned at the beginning that he would support. Commissioner Ayers asked County Manager Bennett to keep this in mind when doing budget allocations.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Vice Chairman Bond made a MOTION to adjourn the meeting, with a SECOND by Commissioner Gurganus. The Board unanimously APPROVED the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:03 p.m.

Ronnie Smith, Chairman

Marion B. Thompson,
Deputy Clerk to the Board