

October 11, 2023
Regular Session

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on Wednesday, October 11, 2023 at 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, County Clerk to the Board Julia S. Rease, County Attorney Benjamin Eisner, and Finance Officer Cindy Ange,

Others in Attendance: Sheriff Tim Manning and McAdams & Associates Emily Miller (Via Webex)

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Biggs led the Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioner Gurganus provided the invocation. Chairman Smith extended a welcome to all and asked that everyone be respectful.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. made a Motion to approve the agenda, with a Second from Commissioner Gurganus. Discussion: Commissioner Ayers asked if the budget amendments that were sent to the Board via email on Monday afternoon, would be included in the agenda. Chairman Smith agreed. Commissioner Ayers asked to table Budget Amendment #12 and that Commissioner Gurganus had comments on this matter. Commissioner Gurganus stated Budget Amendment #12 needed to be taken off the agenda for obvious reasons. Commissioner Gurganus stated the budget amendment was the same amendment that was discussed before and was tabled. Commissioner Gurganus also stated the amendment needed to be removed, as there were things that needed to be worked out such as answers as to whom approved the amendment, the current lawsuit in place, and the investigation from the State Auditor's Office. Chairman Smith stated Budget Amendment #12 was tabled in last month's meeting to the next regular meeting October 11, 2023 as stated in the records. Chairman Smith stated that if a vote was needed, to do so. Commissioner Ayer stated that there was nothing in the procedures stating that an item could not be tabled again if it was tabled before. Chairman Smith stated in order to table the budget amendment, a vote was needed.

Commissioner Ayers Motioned to table Budget Amendment #12 until answers were given with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus.

Motion was not Carried (2-3) - Ayes: Commissioner Joe R. Ayers and Commissioner David "Skip" Gurganus

Nays: Chairman Ronnie Smith, Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr., and Commissioner Emily Biggs

The original Motion to approve the agenda as stated was Carried (3-2):

Ayes: Chairman Ronnie Smith, Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr., and Commissioner Emily Biggs

Nays: Commissioner Joe R. Ayers and Commissioner David" Skip" Gurganus

PUBLIC COMMENTS

County Attorney Eisner read the public comment procedures aloud. Chairman Smith commented that many public members signed up for public comment and hoped that everyone would have the opportunity to speak. Chairman Smith reported that County Attorney Eisner would use a timer for the public comment period and reiterated public comment procures. Chairman Smith stated that no one needed to address individuals, everyone needed to be courteous, and that everyone would love each other regardless of differences.

Commissioner Ayers asked the County Clerk about a motion to make sure that it was noted correctly to state that he and Commissioner Gurganus voted Nay in the last motion. County Clerk Rease agreed.

Mr. Michael O'Neal

Mr. O'Neal stated, "Good evening. Thank you for allowing me to speak. The first thing that I'd like to address is a simple logistics question. With the current situation, political situation, economic situation that we are having at this time. You have to anticipate people wanting to be in the know and participate in the political process. I would hope in the future that maybe we would schedule it at the Telecenter, or at the high school in the auditorium. We have 100 people out here in the hall that have no clue of what's going on. I'm sitting right here by the door and I haven't heard a word that was said up to this point. We do have facilities here in the County and I think we should take advantage of them."

"Now for the reason that I'm here. I am the Post Commander for American Legion Post 131. We recently received a letter informing us that we're being assessed \$195.00 for a solid waste removal fee. We sent a letter requesting an exemption from that fee; simply because we've been at that post for 50 years, we've never been assessed a fee, the County has never picked up so much as a napkin or a straw from our facility, we take care of our own trash removal. We only meet once month, so we don't have much, we make sure that we take everything with us when we leave. Now that letter evidently was presented before the commission and it was denied for us to be exempt from that. Reason being, an availability fee being imposed on us. Now, I don't know why for fifty years we've not had an availability fee imposed, but let me explain to you how an availability fee, how that relates to the general public. If I were to start a guiding service to guide people fishing and I make it available to all the members in Martin County that participate in Martin County Government. For \$200.00 a year, I will take you fishing, as many times you want to go. Several people pay to go fishing and I take them fishing as many times as they want to go. Nobody on the County Commissioners decide they want to take advantage of that opportunity, so nobody pays up front. Well, at the end of the year, then I should be able to assess you a \$ 200.00 fee because I made that service available to you. That's how unreasonable that appears to the general public.

With that said, and the fact that we are one of two Veteran nonprofit organizations in the county. It is we the Veterans that have provided us the opportunity to be here. I've provided y'all the opportunity to run for the elected and to serve as County Commissioners. I would respectfully request that - that would be reevaluated and Hamilton American Legion Post 131 be exempt from that fee. Thank you. With that said, do I need to resubmit or is this sufficient to be reconsider or do we need to resubmit a request for reconsideration?"

Chairman Smith gave Post Commander stated that this would be the Tax Assessor's decision in how he should move forward.

Mr. Paul Roberson -1887 Bonnie Best Road "Commissioners and citizens greeting, I come to you tonight because our County is in a dire situation. Population decline, the loss of Martin General Hospital, lack of new businesses, and the lack of incentives for new business and industry are some concerns our County faces. However, I'm here to talk about a different issue that must change in order for our County to survive. That is the County's current leadership. The lack transparency, allegations of corruption and dishonesty from the leadership are a cancer on our community. I spoke to this same Board two years ago about illegal changes on tax values on properties that had recently sold. There was a tax investigation done and who was in charge of that? It was Manager Bennett and the former Tax Assessor. This is a bit like putting the foxes in charge to watch the chickens. It ended up in a situation where I had clients who ended up contacting Auditor Wood. Myself and others, also filed a grievance with Auditor Wood and provided supporting documents. Two years later and after an \$111,000.00 audit, Auditor Wood found that 259 properties were changed against statute. The County continues to play word games and claim their actions weren't illegal. Against statutes, means illegal. This Board is attempting to intimidate and burden citizens by invading their privacy through demanding access to the interior citizen's homes to disprove an illegal tax increase, but this is a fight for another day. Citizens and members of the Board, rest assured this fight is far from over. I digress, but I brought this up because this was my first time dealing with the Board and Manager Bennett. This experience taught me all I need to know about how some members of it operate. Hiding in the shadows, not explaining positions on issues to citizens, failing to answer questions from the media and the public. I don't know if I can say this, but I'm going to say it. If you stop me, you stop me. Chairman Smith you were in the Air Force. The most significant motto of the Air Force is "Integrity First, Service before Self, and Excellence in All We Do", but you have failed to remember this motto, when it comes to doing the people's business in Martin County. In a previous meeting in September, you sat on the bench of a Superior Court Judge, smiling, sneering, and laughing as a citizens expressed concerns about getting her medical records from Martin General. Further, you had the audacity to tell the citizen, the procedure was established by Qourum. The County Manager's Office simply provided information to the citizens and it was not your problem. You work for that citizen. I and many others were appalled by the attitude. You are not a king or a dictator, despite you going around telling people this is your County. You're here because the citizens put you here and now they demand you leave your position as Commissioner. It has been long standing policy of this Board to rotate the position of chair, until you monopolized and hijacked the position three years ago. The people, in large numbers, many of which voted for you, now stand united demanding your resignation. From the ethical way in which Manager Bennett was hired, till now, your name consistently comes up any time there're allegations of wrong doing. You refused in Open Session to answer the question posed by Commissioner Gurganus and the citizens as to who approved the raises for the County Manager. Commissioner Ayers, Gurganus, and Bond have all three stated in open meetings that

no vote took place and there was never any discussion of raises for Manager Bennett. Commissioner Biggs sat silent, but has no authority, ultimately, to issue a raise in the ladder. So, there lies the answer Mr. Chairman. It was you and you alone. If the citizens are wrong, prove it. You have the opportunity right now to set the record straight. Who approved the raise? Silence speaks volumes. We the people will continue to dig and uncover instances of any corruption, lack of transparency and wrongdoing, by you and other members of the Board. This is a warning to all the other Commissioners. If you stand with Chairman Smith, be prepared to fall with Chairman Smith. As we uncover wrongdoings, they go directly to the government oversight agencies and to the authorities. I have a serious concern that I may not receive the public records I've requested as afforded to me by state law, especially those texts and emails related to raises, but no matter how many papers may be shredded, files destroyed, and messages deleted, there is always a digital foot print, and if I can't get it the courts can. In closing, why sir, do you want to govern a body of people that has lost faith in you and no longer want you to represent them? Chairman you have violated the very motto you learned in the Air Force. You have put power and corruption above integrity, self above service, failure above excellence. I employ you not to put this County through another long, expensive investigation. Every minute spent on this is precious time that needs to go to saving our County. Your resignation or removal is the only acceptable way to forward for Martin County. Sir, if you have an honor left from your days in the Air Force, please resign so this Board can get back to saving our County. Thank you"

Ms. Joyce Gray-No address given "50 years ago, I returned to Martin County. At that time, I started coming to the Commissioners meeting. We were meeting in a little small room that had about five people and I was the only black there, and that went on for years and years. I did not miss a Commissioners meeting and at that time there was only one black elected official and that was the Mayor of Parmele. I never got to meet him, but I heard about him. I worked faithfully in the NAACP to get this building built as Secretary along with the education chair. It was designed not to be handicapped accessible and we fought to get it and make it handicap accessible and then we worked hard to get people to stay out of jail so they could run for elected offices. I haven't been coming to meetings of lately, because you see I don't move like I used to. But, I'm going to ask publicly, from what I've seen on television, I'm going to ask the Commissioners to stay in place and fight the battle. You don't leave the fight in the middle of the game. Stay in your place and fight the battle. I understand people want you to resign, some of you to resign. I'm going to ask you publicly to stay in your place and fight the battle and whatever I can do with my prayers, I don't write for the newspaper anymore, but whatever I can do to spread the good word, cause Martin County need to grow, I will do. I've witness Martin General did not do right by people that looked like me. I helped some of them and when they got their help, they left Martin County. They did not make it public knowledge that there were members of the NAACP. Some of them lost their cars and some of them lost their jobs because they didn't want the public people to know that they were members of the NAACP. Now you know we fight for Civil Rights and I'm still doing my job to the best of my ability. I am asking the Commissioners that's been asked to resign to stay in place. Thank you"

Mr. Moe Matthews – no address given "Greeting to the Commissioners and everybody else. Ms. Gray said that she was here 50 years, well, 49 years ago. I came to Martin County for a 2-year stay. Our responsibilities when I came to work for Weyerhaeuser, we were instructed to be corporate citizens and ambassadors for the community we lived in. For 49 years, I try to live up to that. Those requirements and I felt, and still feel that I've been an ambassador for this region, and

particularly for Martin County in many respects. I too would like the Commissioners to hold your ground, stay in place, and do what you do. I hear all these numbers floating around and you know you can spend a trillion dollars to make the untrue, true, and you're wasting your time. I have a challenge for my neighbors in this community. When I look at, of course I served on the School Board for 20 years. We tried to promote all the folks that we knew that would be advantageous and beneficial to the growth to this community, because if you're not growing, you're dying. When we look at some of the benefits and services that Martin General Hospital, were let go, because my two boys were born there. Were born healthy, with services. That service went away. ICU went away. Every time a service goes a way, then the question that should be ask is why. I feel for the County Commissioners for the last decade or so, we had a contract that was supposed to go to 2028. What went down prior to this year or last year? In my mind what were the activities that took place to try to prevent further decay. My request to the community and to the Board, I would like to know and for the folks that's calling me asking what did I know, because I don't know anything, but what I do know is that there is a history that says exactly what activities were done, were made to try to save Martin General Hospital. We weren't the only ones in the State, we weren't the only one in the nation that had similar population, what have you, but what was done? And what I would like to know, so I can tell my folks, who were the members in our communities that were on whatever committee, whatever study team, whatever, whatever, prior to the last consultant that was brought in that was trying to give some narrative to a sinking ship. We are in a situation right now that there is no way in the world Williamston, Bear Grass, Robersonville, Jamesville graduates from the 1980's till now, would want to come and live in this County, or bring their grandkids here. I got grandkids. You know public meetings supposed to be three minutes on the school Board, I don't know what it is in here, but I will cut it short. I wouldn't want my grandkids and suggest anybody's grandkids come to Martin County in this point in time because It is ridiculous. We're dying, were fighting one another. We might as well be over in Israel, we may as well. It doesn't make sense and so much was going on, were destroying our leaders and we got good leaders. You've got some of the best kind of Commissioners in the state and if you don't know about it, then read about it. You're not going to find it on Facebook, Instagram, and all of that. When you think about it, you won't be able to find it at the institution that most of us grew up on. The family is decaying or dead, the school system is broken, and the church is broken. All the major institutions that we relayed on, brought up on, and made us staple is on a deaths spider. As far as I am concerned, when I see someone signing petitions to try to get rid of any one of these elected officials, to me I compare to you running a restaurant trying to get rid of your best chefs."

Mrs. Martha MacDonald – 20770 US HWY 64 "Do any of you recognize this? *We are an elected group of concerned citizens who love Martin County and provide leadership as an extension of State Government. We strive to effectively and efficiently manage tax dollars and resources and encourage development and job creation by supporting businesses and promoting Martin County.* Anyone? Well, it's your mission statement. You're not living up to it. Effectively and efficiently managing, tax dollars? Maybe if you are the County Management. Effectively and efficiently managing resources, can we say expensive water you can't drink? Encourage job creation? Can we say Martin General Hospital and the loss of jobs? Promoting Martin County, I don't think so. A Commissioners sitting up there when he was running for office, I walked up to him and I said, why should I vote for you? He told me, I listened, and I voted. Then I asked, are you going to be a man and vote your own conscious? *Yes ma'am I am.* I think he has become a puppet for Mr. Smith. Shame on you. Tonight you had the opportunity to change that. Commissioner Smith you

are retired military. For retired military, you have Tri Care, which is health care. You don't pay for it. I called several, well some time ago when they absolutely cut the retirees benefits to almost nothing. I called and I got a copy of the Commissioners expense reports. As I was reviewing it, I saw that Commissioner Smith is getting health insurance paid for by this County. Commissioner Smith, by his own admission, since he's retired military. Retired Military has Tri Care. Why in the world are we paying your health care when you have Tri Care. When I retired from Martin County, I opted out. These good people don't deserve to pay my health care. My husband fought and bled for me to have that. You need to take care of that and we don't need to pay your health care. I called Mr. Smith after I asked Mr. Bennett about it and he told me he had to pay for it and I said I don't think so. So then, I called Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith said, when I questioned him, I said, why are you being paid healthcare when you have Tricare? And I quote, folks listen carefully, he said, *I am entitled*. You know, you might be entitled for a lot of stuff, but you're not entitled to use the taxpayers money for your entitlement. You know, this whole thing, I am absolutely disgusted. The deceit that has gone on here is unbelievable. I can only think of one person in my background that would absolutely have a problem with all of this. Some of you know her and some of you remember her in a not so often good light because you remember her only when she was older, and sick, and confused. However, she did more for this County, than you will ever do. She loved this County. She would get in her vehicle and she would drive to Raleigh. She would drive to D.C. She didn't have an expense account. She did it because she loved this County and she paid for it out of her own pocket and expected nothing. Except she wanted to make this community better. For over 60 years, she told me the same thing. Every time I would leave her, she would put her hands together and she would say, *We must work together and we must save the children*. Let me say that again, *We must work together and we must save the children*. You are not doing that. You're certainly not working together and you're certainly are not taking care of the children. If something were to happen, they have no hospital, but more importantly, you are taking away the dollars from them for their future. We could be doing things for those children and you're deciding to give it to other people. I cannot and my Aunt Lee Anne would be absolutely disappointed in you and you know that. And if you don't know who I'm talking about, I'm talking about Lee Ann Peele. So, obviously, were not going to work together on this thing, but you know what, Mr. Smith, this whole thing with you. Your smugness, your arrogance, is just unbelievable. Doing things that you have done in backrooms, deceitful. And like Paul said, If it was done and its right, show us. I will gladly say; *you know I was wrong*, but until you do that, I know in my heart that you did it illegally. You know, you needs to step down. In regardless to what someone in here said, you need to step down and you need to step down now. I would like to thank Commissioner Ayers and Commissioner Gurganus for your tireless dedication to the citizens of this County. To the citizens, thank you for the opportunity to speak in your house, not theirs, your house. This is ours, not theirs and its time we took it back. All I have to say in closing is that may God have mercy on your soul he's the only one that will and May God save Martin County. Thank you."

Mrs. Kathy Price - 2949 Wildcat Road – "I did not plan on speaking tonight, but when I found out that twelve was added back on for you to vote on Mr. Bennett's raises, I had to say something. I want to know why that the Sheriff's Department knows that those raises were given illegally. They know that for a fact. The District Attorney knows it for a fact and I want to know what has to be done before someone does something about it. What has to be done before it's voted on to give him a raise retroactively to cover up the wrong doing that was done previously. I also want to know, is it Rosenwald? The school was given a grant here for our County, for a school, a colored school in Hamilton, NC. It was given a large amount of money, but the Board or Mr. Smith decided

to give a large amount of money to Ms. Tina Brown in Robersonville and another large amount of money to Charlotte Griffin in Bear Grass for the Charter School. I want to know do these people get to decide what they do with grants. I thought there was rules to apply grant money. We're being deceived, were being deceived. This is not a black - white issue. We have grown in this country. It is not a Democrat or Republican issue. It is a right – wrong issue. What is right and if we continue to have leaders like this. Look at our County, we have nothing here. Nothing. No industries, nothing for our children to stay here, nothing for the people already here to do. They have not grown our County. Nobody. We need knew honest leadership that people want to do something for our County, not just to put money in their pockets, or somebody else's pocket and after this meeting you can go to my Facebook post and I am going to post a video and I want you to watch it and I will tell you where that video came from."

Chairman Smith apologized to the four remaining individuals that signed up for public comment stating that the 30-minute public comment period had concluded. Chairman Smith asked Attorney Benjamin Eisner to read the public comment procedures.

Members of the audience began making comments in reference to the public comment time limit.

Before Attorney Eisner could start, Commissioner Ayers stated that the Board had enough time to listen to the citizens and Commissioner Gurganus echoed.

Attorney Eisner read the public comment procedures that reference public comment time limits.

Members of the public continued to make comments regarding the extension of the public comment period.

Chairman Smith called Dr. Meredith to the podium and asked for a motion to extend the public comment limit.

Commissioner Ayers made the **Motion** to extend the time for public comments, with a **Second** by Commissioner Gurganus. The Motion was **Carried** Unanimously.

Dr. Meredith - no address given "My name is John Meredith, I'm a physician. I used to be the Director of the Emergency Department of Martin General. I've heard a lot of anger and frustration tonight, that is not where Doctor Chawla and I are going to start off. We both recognize that you've had a very difficult task, a Herculean task, in effort to try to get this hospital back open and redefined as a Rural Emergency Hospital (REH). We need publicly work together, set differences aside. We have a health care crisis in this county. Our number one priority, all of us, is getting the hospital redefined as a Rural Emergency Hospital to provide emergency services for the citizens of our county. This is the most important issue facing this county. Again, Doctor Chawla and myself are appreciative of your hard work in what you're trying to do and we are supportive in that regard. I want to lead on though with that, in August, the Martin County Health Care Collaborative, a 501 C(3) nonprofit made a presentation, a proposal, and abbreviated business plan. Yet no further open discussion of that has occurred that I'm aware of and we have not been included in any discussions with Ascendent Health Care Advisers, the consulting firm that you've hired. And by the way, they are an excellent consulting firm; I think you made the right choice there. But Rural Emergency Hospitals (REH) mostly are managed by a nonprofit entity. It's not a for profit entity

such as Qourum and to place the responsibility of opening our hospital as an REH in terms of something that is not a nonprofit, I think will place the hospital at future financial risk. Any future management entity for Martin General Hospital, as it's defined as a Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) ; needs to have strong community involvement, it needs to have members from the County Commissioners on the board. It needs to have strong physician involvement on that board. Such an entity needs to be open and transparent, and the responsibility to the public that it serves. Only a nonprofit can meet those standards. Again, I'm appreciative of the efforts that are being made and I don't want to sound in any way angry or frustrated. I come up here trying to find and help with a solution, So that we can get health care back to the citizens of Martin County. In that regard, we all need to work together, we need to set our differences aside and get the hospital opened and redefined as an REH as soon as possible. Thank you, gentlemen and ladies very much."

Lawrence Lilley – Williamston, NC "Good evening I'm Lawrence Lilley. I am from Williamson and lived in Martin County for 69 years. I come speaking only on behalf of myself, not representing any group of other people. The information I'll be sharing with you is public record. The opinions are my own, but I think they're shared by many. July the 19th, our county commissions received a letter from Qourum that had a term sheet. It's fairly complex, and I don't think anybody include myself could necessarily work through it without the aid of a CPA and a lawyer. However, what happened was nothing. There was a very tight time limit on the response to this. There was five days to answer the term and then there was another ten days, I believe there was an extension in there, five days. Nevertheless, August the third was a deadline that had to be met. What happened was the catastrophic closing of our hospital. There was no contingency plan. There was little effort to work through. Let me read something from this term sheet for you, *Term sheet shall not bind or commit any party to the terms set forth herein and no party shall rely on this term sheet for any purpose, but parties agree to work towards definitive agreements, incorporating these terms.* Now that's a lot of language, but it sounds like an invitation to negotiate, to me. We could have signed this term sheet and extended the operations of hospital. There could have been an effort to contract with the company that runs the emergency department, which was not Qourum; it was a third party to continue to have an emergency department. I don't believe there's any, any evidence that any of that was done, but what was done was people went to Texas for three days to a meeting, and as someone eloquently put, they went on vacation when the house was on fire. Now, rural hospitals are challenged and you have not had an easy task, but what happened between July 19th and August 3rd is dereliction of duty, and it has consequences. This information I'm sharing with you came from Chief Michael Peaks, Since August 3rd through September 30th, the Williamston Emergency Management Group has had 295 calls to which we say they have responded heroically, but their transport times from when they pick up the patient to go to the emergency department, have moved from an average of 5 minutes and 28 seconds to 18 minutes and 58 seconds, that's 13 and a half minutes of transport time when people's lives often are in the balance. If you multiply that out, it can give you a difference perspective. 295 calls at 13 and a half minutes totals 66 hours of additional time when people's lives were in the balance. The Williamston Health Clinics Doctor Chawla and his brother saw, according to what they told me, 14,000 patients a year, or about 56 a day. In the other clinics, which were impacted by this, saw another 12,000, which is another 47, that's a 103 people every day who have not been able to have access to primary health care. In many cases, there are people who have few other resources available to them to be able to get that and access that healthcare. Restoration of our hospital in some form is imperative and I don't know what it will look like, but it needs to come in as quickly as possible, but partners who may be willing to look at that. We will ask and expect to have credible leadership from the county. Well,

they won't want to talk with us. They won't want to do it. They won't want to look at what we have to offer. We have officials in place who do not have that, credibility. Mr. Bennett has resigned and the only way that Mr. Smith can continue to serve this county and take care of the citizens he sworn oath to, at this point in time, is to resign.”

Mr. O’Neil was called to the podium, but had already made his public comment as his name was written twice.

Robert Mack Stalls – 1125 Bobby Roberson Road Williamston “Nero fiddle about Rome burned. The county, excuse me. This story is symbolic of how the ruler decided to place his own desires above those. the people and the well being of his citizens. On July 19 2023, Qourum Health notified Martin County of its desire to discuss, yet again, the critical financial condition of Martin General Hospital. On July 21 – 24, 2023, the National Association of Counties or NACo held a conference in Austin, Texas. Martin County Commissioners Ronnie Smith, Dempsey bond, Emily Biggs chose to attend, as well as the County Manager James Bennett and the Board **Clerk**. The pre-planned organized and intentional gathering of these three commissioners appeared to be, or appeared to constitute a qourum as defined in G.S. 153(a) – 43(a) and Martin County Board of Commissioners rules of procedure, item 22. Three Commissioners or members of the public body, or G.S. 143 – 318.10(b). They're gathering together, appears to be a public, excuse me, they're gathering together appears to be an official meeting for G.S. 143 – 318.10(d). The location and nature of this meeting appears to satisfy the requirements of G.S. 153 – 40(c)(4). Where are the minutes of this meeting? Required by G.S. 153(a) - 42 and G.S. 143 - 318.10 (e). The NACo conference gathering appears to be yet another meeting conducted in violation of general statues. If, for some reason, the three commissioners did not believe this was an official meeting, where is the filing of a notice of quorum recorded. This notice, this Board has filed such notices in the past, even when a potential quorum would possibly happen at a holiday parade. The NACo Conference, for the three Commissioners and the County Manager was of greater importance than meeting with the hospital officials to deal with the impending termination of services and jobs. Surely, the citizens of Martin County deserve a full report on the activities information gathered and results of the NACo Conference, none has been given. The three Commissioners and the County Manager were fiddling in Texas while Martin General Hospital was burning. Was this gross negligence or intentional? Neither is acceptable.”

Chairman Smith stated that the entire public comment list was exhausted and the public comments were appreciated. An individual was left out and Chairman Smith called him to make his public comment.

Mr. John Coltrain- no address given “Over a year ago, I attended Martin County Commissioners meeting and express my concerns for the lack of transparency being shown by some members of our County Board. Apparently, my comments fell on either deaf or indifferent ears. Tonight, once again, I stand before you with serious concerns about some circumstances involving two of our board members, as well as our County Manager. The Martin County website discloses the residence addresses of our Commissioners. The resident address of Commissioner Biggs shows to be 1506 West Main Street, Williamston, NC. Based on my observations and the observations of others, it is my belief that Commissioner Biggs does not reside at that address. Based on my observations and observations of others, it is my belief that Commissioner Biggs, as recent as a few days ago has been residing at 203 West Simmons Avenue, Williamston, North Carolina. Also, based on my observation and the observation of others, it is my belief that our County Manager,

Mr. James Bennett, has also been residing at that same address. My understanding is that neither of these two individuals are married. It is my belief that if Commissioner Biggs and County Manager Bennett are at the present time or have at any time prior in the past resided at that same address, Commissioner Biggs has violated our County Commissioner Code of Ethics and County Manager Bennett has conducted behavior such as to warrant his dismissal from employment. Commissioner Biggs cannot or could not at any previous time while she was residing in the same household as Bennett; make emotion, second a motion, or cast a vote involving any matter that might benefit Manager Bennett, without the suspicion of her doing so under improper influence as described in the first paragraph of section two of the Martin County Code of Ethics. It is my belief that Commissioner Biggs should have recused herself from being involved with any of those for mentioned situations. As a Commissioner, voted into office by the trusting citizens of Martin County, with the expectations of her being able to make wise and impartial decisions regarding the welfare of our county, and doing so in a respectable and transparent manner; It is my belief that Commissioner Biggs has failed. Both she and Mr. Bennett should have known that their living arrangement was suspicious at best and that it conflicted with our Code of Ethics, therefore it is my belief that Miss Emily Biggs should resign immediately from our Martin County Board of Commissioners. It is also my belief that the Martin County Board of Commissioners should appoint an independent committee to review all motion, seconds, and votes cast by Commissioner Biggs that in any way involved or pertained to the Manager Bennett and that those motions, seconds to motions, and or votes should be set aside, and declared null and void. It is also my belief that because of the apparent close relationship between Commissioner Biggs, Manager Bennett, and Board Chairman Smith. It would be illogical to think that Chairman Smith was not aware that Manager Smith and Commissioner Biggs were occupying the same residence. As Board Chairman, Mr. Smith would be expected to address that living arrangement and bring it to the attention of the entire board to be discussed and resolved. Apparently, Smith chose not to do so. I've questioned two Martin County Commissioners as to whether or not they were advised of the living arrangement between Biggs and Bennett. Both commissioners deny ever having been informed by Smith, Biggs or Bennett of that living arrangement. Therefore, it is my belief that Chairman Smith has also violated the Martin County Board of Commissioner Code of Ethics, failed to comply with the duties expected of a board chairman and, therefore should immediately resign from this Board. North Carolina Statute 14 -230 reads; it refers to willful, willfully failing to discharge duties. *If any Clerk of Court of Record, Sheriff, Magistrate, School Board member, County Commissioner, County Surveyor, Coroner, Treasurer, or Official of any of the state institutions or any county, city, or town shall willfully omit, neglect, or refuse to discharge any of the duties of his office for default whereof, it is not elsewhere provided that he shall be indicted, he shall be guilty of a Class 1 Misdemeanor. If it shall be proved that such officer, after qualification, willfully and corruptly omitted, neglected, or refuse to discharge any of the duties of his office or willfully and corruptly violated his oath of office, according to the true intent and meaning, thereof, such officers shall be guilty of a misdemeanor in office and shall be punished by removal there from under the sentence of the court as a part of the punishment for this offense,* Miss Biggs, Mr. Smith, I'm calling on you to resign tonight. Thank you."

CONSENT AGENDA

Chairman Smith reported that the Board received an email from County Manager Bennett regarding an Interlocal Agreement from Bertie County requesting support with building inspections due their Building Inspector resignation. Chairman Smith reported that Building

Inspector Jody Griffin provided a letter stating he was willing to provide support under certain conditions. Chairman Smith stated that Board members had the opportunity to review the documents, the item would be added to the Consent Agenda, and asked if there were any additional items to add.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr., made the Motion to **Approve** the Consent Agenda with the corrections, with a **Second** by Chairman Smith. Motion was **Carried** unanimously.

Minutes –

August 9, 2023 Regular

August 9, 2023 Special

1. Financial Report – September 2023

2. Tax Assessor – Tax Refund Request – September 2023

3. Tax Assessor – Tax Relief Orders – September 2023

Year Levy	Lname	Fname	Reason	Value	Total
September 2023 – Tax Relief Order – VTS Refund Request					
2023	Barnard	Earle Eugene	Error In Value - State Audit	\$78.22	\$73.84
2023	King	Keith Scott	Adjustment Refund – BOC App.	\$511.44	\$270.72
2023	Blevins	Terry Allen Ar.	Adjustment Refund –BOC App.	\$88.00	\$83.60
2023	Arnold	Shaneka Yvonne	Adjustment Refund- BOC App.	\$83.93	\$56.96
2023	Services, Inc	Martin County Resid	Error In Value – State Audit	\$752.50	\$182.43
September 2023 - Tax Relief Orders – Real & Personal Releases					
2023	Bowen	Troy L Heirs	Error in Listing		\$2,133.13
2023	LLC	Cakes by Becky	SW Fee Count – Own Dumpster		\$1,978.26
2023	Chilton	William Lee	Double Listing	3,760	\$33.46
2020	Hoggard Jr.	Meredith Pritchard Jr.	Double Listing		\$7.57
2021	Hoggard Jr.	Meredith Pritchard Jr.	Double Listing		\$7.27
2022	Hoggard Jr.	Meredith Pritchard Jr.	Double Listing		\$7.27
2023	Hoggard Jr.	Meredith Pritchard Jr.	Double Listing		\$6.99
		Total VTS Refunds			\$667.55
		Total Real & Personal Releases			\$4,173.95
Overall total:					\$4,841.50

4. Tax Collector's Report – September 2023

	Category	December	12 -21 Y-T-D
Real Property	20	\$15,464.19	\$77,351.90
Personal Property	25	\$1,213.77	\$30,642.89
Total		<u>\$16,677.96</u>	<u>\$107,994.79</u>
Motor Vehicle	30	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total MV		<u>\$0.00</u>	<u>\$107,994.79</u>
All Total		\$16,677.96	\$107,994.79

5. Board Appointments/Reappointments/Resignations

a. ABC Board Appointments

Janie Grady and Steve Cannon were recommended to be reappointed at the request of the ABC board for their term.

This item was approved by the Board as an item on the Consent agenda.

6. Tax Collector's - Order To Collect

Last month, the Annual Settlement form the Tax Collector's Office was received and approved by the Board without the Order to Collect due to it being turned in on September 25, 2023. The Order to Collect is attached for approval as part of the Consent Agenda.

This Item was Approved by the Board as Part of the Consent Agenda.

7. AIA Contract Grant Awardee for Water Districts I & II

The County advertised for a Request for Qualifications in July to procure an engineering firm to complete the Asset Inventory and Assessment of Water System project via a \$400,000 grant awarded by DEQ in the spring. The firms submitted qualifications: The Wooten Company, Withers Ravenel, and Hazen and Sawyer. The proposals were evaluated by the County's grant consultant, McAdams & Associates, based on the scoring criteria in the RFQ. McAdams & Associates provided the following:

	Wither's Ravenel	The Wooten Company	Hazen and Sawyer
Consultant's Experience with Similar Projects (max 25 points)	25 points – all projects listed in proposal were in line with scope of work for Martin County AIA project and located in NC.	10 points – did not include Conflict of Interest Statement, did not include total project cost in all projects listed, project team members not mentioned in project experience, none of projects listed for AIA projects.	20 points – all projects listed in proposal had similar scopes but only one was in NC and per DEQ guidelines.
Project Approach	40 points – very detailed and thorough.	40 points –detailed and thorough.	30 points – asset management software noted as if grant funding permits

(max 40 points)			and County needs engineer o be able to complete entire scope within budget.
Project Team Experience (max 25 points)	25 points – projects under project experience were also listed in project team bios, experience relevant and have completed several AIAs in NC.	20 points – did not reference roles responsibilities on projects listed under project experience did show strong direct and relevant team experience with AIA projects.	15 points – did not reference roles / responsibilities on projects listed under project experience, did list team members in project experience section.
Familiarity with Locality (max 10 points)	5 points – experience in eastern region of NC even though not directly in Martin County.	10 points – years of experience with Martin County’s water system.	05 points – no experience in eastern region on NC, no statement about familiarity with locality or surrounding areas.

This item was Approved by the Board as part of the Consent Agenda.

8. Clerk Report

INTRODUCTION OF NEW EMPLOYEE(S)

NC Cooperative Extension Director Lisa Smith introduced the new 4H and Youth Development Agent on behalf of the North Carolina Club Extension Service, North Carolina State A&T, and North Carolina State University. The new 4H and Youth Development Agent, Sean Wallace, was stated to be from Martin County and that it was a pleasure to have someone from the County to return and give back to the community. Mr. Wallace thanked the Board for the opportunity and he looked forward to serving Martin County.

The Board welcomed Mr. Wallace.

Human Resources Director introduced new employees from the Department of Social Services. Ms. Michelle Bowen was introduced first as a Public Information Officer and Janet Bowen who was the new Income Maintenance Caseworker I.

The Board welcomed the new employees.

PRESENTATIONS

Martin General Hospital - Ascendient Health Care Advisors Consultant Dawn Carter

Ascendient Consultant Dawn Carter presented updates in the efforts to find a hospital operator for Martin General Hospital. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that she was the Senior Partner for Ascendient Healthcare Providers, which was based in of Chapel Hill, NC. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that she had 35 years of experience in the healthcare industry. Ascendient Healthcare Partners reportedly conducted strategy, planning, and feasibility work for hospitals, public health departments, and others in the healthcare space. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that a majority of her experience was conducted in rural healthcare and that she understood rural healthcare and its challenges.

It was mentioned that healthcare overall was facing unprecedented challenges and in Ascendient Consultants Carters’ experience, the industry was difficult, complex, and the pandemic made it

more challenging. One of the CPA's from the Ascendient firm conducted a study that found that 80 % of the largest health systems across the United States lost money in 2022 from their operations and investments. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated about a year ago, the County engaged the firm with the foresight to understand that the Qourum lease was ending in 2028. It was also understood that healthcare was changing for rural America and across the Country. Therefore, the best path for Martin County needed to be figured out and there were questions as to what healthcare would look like in the future as it changed in North Carolina. Quorum's unexpected decision to file for bankruptcy reportedly accelerated the process that began a year ago, but it was good that the process did start a year ago to have the progress achieved thus far.

Ascendient Health Partners Efforts Made in the First Year to Current

In the first year of being engaged, Ascendient Health Partners questioned what healthcare models would be right and sustainable for Martin County going forward because what was heard from Qourum was that the current model was unsustainable and they could not continue to operate. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the firm completed analyzing different hospitals around late winter, early spring, to see which one would be best for the County. One of the models determined as an option and mentioned by Dr. Meredith in his public comment, was the Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) model. The Rural Emergency Hospital (REH) model/classification was reportedly brand new, created by the Federal government, and was designed in recognition that rural hospitals were needed in certain communities to provide access to care. Because these hospitals are rural and have small populations, this did not necessarily mean that there's enough volume to make the facility viable. At that point, the Federal Government reportedly proposed to increase salaries and give rural hospitals monthly payments to keep them open due to financial shortcomings from the a lack in an adequate volume of patients. The REH Designation became effective on January 1, 2024. North Carolina along with a vast majority of other states did not have state law that would allow a hospital to be a REH. Martin County engaged Cody Hand, healthcare lobbyist, to write legislature, to work with the County, and to work with legislative delegation to get the REH passed as North Carolina law. Unfortunately, it was reportedly attached to the state's budget, which delayed the approval of the designation. The REH designation was approved this year, but as of last week, it was reported that REH status was actually law in North Carolina. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that it was Martin County leadership that made this goal happen and efforts of legislatures in the General Assembly.

At the conclusion of Ascendient's Healthcare Advisors efforts in late winter early spring, the plan was to get the REH designation underway. The County reportedly had conversations with other hospital systems, before Ascendient Health Care Advisors, whom were not interested in continuing to operate the hospital under the same model. The operators were also not interested in the model used. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that it was important to have another alternative to discuss when meeting with interested hospital operators. The plan for this spring was for Ascendient Health Partners to move forward with the REH legislature, make sure that it was actually moving in a positive direction, and to start a search for hospital operators before the lease with Qourum Health ended in 2028. Ascendient Consultant Carter expected Quorum's Williamston Hospital Corporation to continue to operate until 2028. By the time Ascendient's Health Care Advisors finished their feasibility study in the spring, Qourum was reportedly making plans to reopen services at the hospital that they previously closed and to bring in additional

physicians this fall. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that these actions were key factors in the advisors belief that Qourum would continue operations. There was reportedly no expectation that Qourum would file a Chapter 7 bankruptcy and closed the hospital as abruptly as they did. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the offer made to the County before Qourum filed the bankruptcy, was untenable. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the County would have had to have millions upon millions of dollars to step in Quorum's shoes in operating the hospital. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that there was a reason why the County got out of the hospital business in the late 1990's. The hospital business was reportedly growing to be a more complex industry that was heavily regulated. The information systems, regulatory knowledge, proper paperwork filing for Medicaid/Medicare and insurers; would have been the responsibility of the County and it would have been impossible for the County to complete by the given deadlines. Another point was that by filing a Chapter 7 bankruptcy case, Qourum was essentially in the process of dissolving the corporation that held the licensure for Martin General Hospital. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that shortly after the bankruptcy case was filed and her firm was engaged, the County legal advisors and her firm met with the bankruptcy trustee and his legal advisors. In that meeting, Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the bankruptcy trustee specifically said that the lease was in his hands at that point; the advisors of the County could not do anything about finding hospital operators because it was his jurisdiction, and that it was a bankruptcy crime if the County moved forward in the search of an operator. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the bankruptcy has since filed a motion to reject the lease, which the bankruptcy judge approved. The lease was reportedly back in the County's possession since that motion was filed and the County could move forward in the search of a hospital operator. The bankruptcy trustee reportedly stated that the County would also have possession of the actual hospital building itself.

The Next Big Steps

Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the next big step was to account for everything (beds, X-Ray machines, time clocks, etc.) in the building and determine what belonged to whom. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that some items in the hospital may belong to the bankruptcy court because they involve the Williamston Hospital Corporation, some may belong to vendors that the Williamston Hospital Corporation owes money to, and eventually some items may go to the County if the owners abandoned them. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that she understood the burden the hospital closure had on the community and the EMS system. Unfortunately, the reality was that the County could not go into the hospital to operate it today because they did not have the means to do so. It was reported that even if the County hired a hospital operator today, the operator would not be able to use the items/equipment because they belonged to someone else, and the owner of the equipment/item could prove ownership and take the items out of the hospital. This was the reason why the items in the hospital needed to be sorted out. The County would reportedly have a role in this matter, but the bankruptcy trustee would still have control over the process. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that her firm would evaluate all possible options to develop and reinstitute the best health services as possible, figure the distribution of the items in the hospital, discover opportunities for additional funding and capital, find a new operator and continue searching for prospects to enter into that process, and continue to collaborate with the County and County advisors to explore and push forward with the REH model. The State statutes were reportedly in place for the REH designation, but rules needed to be implied to it. According to Ascendient Consultant Carter, the firm had been in conversations with the NC Department of Health and Human Services to figure out how this might play out in Martin

County. The bottom line was that this was a complex matter because it involved healthcare, there was a bankruptcy issue, the trustee had to be involved, the building and equipment needed to be figured, and there were State and Federal regulations to meet if the REH was the best model for Martin County.

Ascendient Healthcare partners were reportedly searching for short and long term solutions in Martin County to ensure that Martin County had healthcare that was needed and was supported. Ascendient Healthcare Partners initiated a process for potential operators to submit their interest and ideas for healthcare for Martin County. Because the hospital property was County owned, the search process had to comply with a specific North Carolina statute in regards to the lease or sale of property that involved a public bid process. It was stated that this NC statute would be followed, but was another level of complexity. Ascendient Consultant Carter informed the audience that this process also included two public hearings, one before proposals are submitted and another before the proposals are available for review by the public and before the County Commissioners make a decision on those proposals. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that this would be a month's long process, but everyone was doing their best. Lastly, Ascendient Consultant Carter committed that she would communicate what could be communicated to the community, would be straightforward in disclosing what she did and didn't know, she would answer any questions she had answers for.

Ascendient Consultant Carter answered questions from the audience and Board after her presentation.

Economic Development Update - Mr. Steve Biggs, Director

Every month, a department or agency with the County presents a departmental or agency update to the Board. This month, EDC Director Steve Biggs gave an update regarding Economic Development.

First, MCEDC Director Biggs stated that mission of the Economic Development Council was to recruit new business and industry, aid the growth in existing business, which was the life blood of this County and all Counties. MCEDC Director Biggs continue to state the mission statement reporting that MCEDC would market the community's business climate and assets, build relationships with key partners, and strive to increase value for new and expanding industries. MCEDC Director stated that in regards to building relationships with key partners, it gave him a Segway into one thing that the EDC recently did. In August 29th - 30th, 2023, MCEDC Director Biggs spent time with all project managers that worked for the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC). The EDPNC was reportedly a state group that searched across the nation and the world for new industries and businesses. MCEDC Director Biggs talked about the benefits of the connection he had with EDPNC.

Ongoing or Completed Projects

MCEDC Director Biggs listed current projects that were being worked on or completed:

- Maintained ACT Award -Work Ready Community for 2022
- NC Telecenter - growing office space occupancy
- NC Telecenter - 1,164 training class attendees in 2022
- NC Telecenter - 2,398 general business meeting attendees in 2022

- Broadband initiatives (ongoing)
- ECU RISE 29 entrepreneurship program (ongoing)
- RAMP East workforce initiative (ongoing)
- Martin County Economic Development Forum (ongoing)
- MCS Business & Industry Innovation Council (ongoing)
- Annual Business & Industry Appreciation Banquet
- 28 New Jobs created in upcoming project

MCEDC Director Biggs explained some programs such as the ECU RISE 29 Entrepreneurship Program. The group participating in the program report on what they are doing for the businesses and industries in Martin and surrounding Counties. It was reported that this program was hosted by Martin County EDC and have had as many as 29 East Carolina University (ECU) students to participate in working with different businesses and industries throughout the County. MCEDC Director Biggs reported that many industries thought that they would be babysitting the students, but have instead learned a lot from the students. Most students participating in the program were graduate students.

MCEDC Director Biggs expressed his joy for the Martin County Schools (MCS) Business and Industry Innovation Council. MCEDC Director Biggs and school staff reportedly visited and worked with businesses and or industries to find out what they wanted children to be educated in as every child did not want to attend college. The Innovation Campus was stated to be a shining star that the County could be sold on. MCEDC Biggs stated that businesses and industries had the opportunity to see what students were learning in regards of trade skills. Since then, there has been more support from those businesses/industries.

Update on Martin County's Employers and Workforce

Next, MCEDC Director Biggs gave an update on the top five employers in Martin County, which were:

Employers	Number of Jobs Provided
Flagstone Foods (Food & Beverage)	500 +
Domtar (Wood Processing)	300 +
Wal-Mart (Retail)	200 +
Weyerhaeuser (Wood Processing)	150 +
Penco Products (Manufacturing)	150 +

There were reportedly more employers in the County, but only the top five were listed. It was stated that Martin County had a working age population of 207,000. MCEDC Director Biggs reported that the County would be in a tough position without people working in Martin County that lived in other counties, as Martin County did not have a sustainable working age population solely. MCEDC Director Biggs reported that he agreed with regionalization and it was the only way smaller counties could prosper.

New Businesses on the Horizon

- Project Hot Rocks - was stated to be a new business attempting to open. The business owners were reportedly remodeling and conducting infrastructure repairs. The official name of the business was *Hot Rocks Asphalt Company* and Chris Simmons was the owner. Mr. Simmons

reportedly had two companies in Columbus County, wherein one was an asphalt company and the other was a concrete company. The Economic Development Developer in Columbus County informed MCEDC Director Biggs that Mr. Simmons did an extremely good job in Columbus County. In negotiating a deal with Mr. Simmons through the State; Mr. Simmons committed to over 200 jobs over the next 24 months at an average wage of \$36,000.00, and Mr. Simmons planned to spend \$489,000 in renovations. This did not include the price for the business, which Mr. Simmons also paid.

- Jernigan Oil Company – The Jernigan Oil Company from Ahoskie reportedly opened recently and was considered as good competition. The business site was reportedly in the Wal-Mart shopping center.
- North Carolina Rail and Commerce Park - The park had industries such as Weitron, Intertape Polymer Group (IPG), and a call center within it. The rail park welcomed Weitron in 2017 as a packing and distributor of refrigerant glass. Weitron created 40 jobs with an average wage of \$44,500.00. MCEDC Director Biggs reported the median household income was \$41,000.00; therefore, Weitron was paying the average household income with one person. There was a lot of money spent in the project of opening Weitron as an industry in the County by way of real & personal property, the Golden Leaf Foundation, and investments from the County. The total investment in Weitron was 14.3 million in capital investments. On an annual basis, Weitron reportedly produced \$12.46 million in economic impact and paid \$60,000.00 in local taxes. In investing in Weitron, it was agreed the rail would be expanded that would provide more rail for another future business. The next steps at the North Carolina Rail and Commerce Park was to move forward with using monies put aside by the County Commissioners to construct a pad ready site. MCEDC Director Biggs stated that once the pad ready site was completed for a Spec building; requests for proposals would be sent out for the best-qualified and priced contractors, and a quick start building would be constructed.

Lastly, MCEDC Director Biggs reported receiving many questions about the AR Textiles building, which reportedly has had two excellent offers on it. Mr. Stan Armstrong, Kittrell & Armstrong, LLC, was reportedly handling the AR Textiles project. The building was stated to need a new roof at a cost of \$1.2 million. No offers have been accepted as of current. MCEDC Director Biggs asked if there were any questions and there were none, but MCEDC Director Biggs thanked the Board for their support.

County Manager Bennett asked MCEDC Director Biggs if he would acknowledge the Economic Development Council Board members that attended. MCEDC Director Biggs acknowledged Commissioner David “Skip” Gurganus and Board Chair Roy Lilley as Board members before thanking the Board for their support.

Bear Grass Road Spot Safety - Brooks Braswell, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT)

Brooks Braswell, Project Engineer, Division One, North Carolina Department of Transportation made a presentation to the Board regarding a safety concern and a possible resolution to the safety concern. Mr. William Bridgers, Division One Engineer, was also in attendance.

Project Engineer Brooks Braswell stated NCDOT identified a safety issues within the County and passed out handouts to the audience regarding the matter. Project Engineer Braswell stated NCDOT had a regional traffic safety unit that helps identify roadways and intersections that have a higher than normal accident history. When these areas are identified and in need of safety improvements, it was reported that there were safety funds that could be pursued to correct the issues with a short-term notice. Next, the safety area becomes a project that has to be scoped, provide a conceptual design and estimate so the project can compete to receive the available share of safety funds from Raleigh. With this information, the projects compete on a benefit cost basis with other safety project across the state. This process was related to a similar program called STIP, but at a smaller scale.

The intersection US 17 Business and State Road (SR 1001), which was Bear Grass Road, was identified in the 2021 Highway Safety Improvement program due to the number of accidents that were occurring at this particular intersection. There were 27 total crashes over the past 10 years, with 16 had frontal impacts, and two severe injury crashes. A consultant reportedly investigated the area and recommended a Reduced Conflict Intersection (RCI) concept as the improved designed to remedy the accidents occurring at the intersection. Project Engineer Braswell added that U-turn bulbs at the US 64 ramps and near the signalized intersection near Wal – Mart.

The RCI concept correlated with the US 17 corridor that NCDOT was attempting to build between Williamston and Washington, NC. Essentially, the entire corridor between Williamston and Washington, NC would have the RCI concept. Project Engineer stated that there was a project called R2511 that was under construction currently. There was another project in development at the four-lane section just south of Williamston that would produce RCI intersections. The contract for this project would let around 2027.

Considering the safety improvement that the RCI concept granted due to its configuration, NCDOT wanted a letter of support from the Board in perusing the improvements stated.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. asked if there would be lights installed at the intersections mentioned. Project Engineer Braswell stated that the RCI concept did not contain signalized intersections. Vice Chairman Bond Jr. clarified his question asking if there would be streetlights installed. Project Engineer Braswell agreed that lights were needed, but there was a limited amount of funding and it did not include lighting. Project Engineer Braswell stated that Vice Chairman Bond Jr.'s concerns could be looked into as a different project. It was reported with the RCI concept, NCDOT tempted with the idea of having signalized intersection at the off and on ramps, but the capacity analysis did not warrant it. Project Engineer Braswell added this might change as traffic patterns change with the implemented RCI concept of design.

Commissioner Gurganus made the **Motion** to send a letter of support to indicating the NCDOT project, with a **Second** by Commissioner Biggs. Motion was **Carried** Unanimously (5-0).

OLD BUSINES – NONE

NEW BUSINESS

Late Present Value Use Program (PUV) Application - Tax Assessor Melissa Phillips

Parcel # 0503374

Tax Assessor Melissa Phillips stated that on July 14, 2023, an ownership transfer occurred on Parcel 0503374 to reflect the passing of one of the property owners. On July 17, 2023, a letter was mailed out to the properties owners with the application, advising them of the 60-day deadline to complete the Present Value Use (PUV) application. In this letter, the Tax Assessor's Office added a statement that stated "Please note.... A signed application submitted prior to the 60th day of the property being transferred will be considered timely even when additional information such as Forestry Plan and Production Incomes are still pending." September 18, 2023, a letter was mailed stating the Tax Assessor's Office did not receive an application and the property was being removed from the PUV program. An estimate of the deferred rollbacks were provided in the letter in the amount of \$6,202.04, which had not been billed as of yet. On October 2, 2023, an application, forestry management plan, FSA production information, and a letter explaining why the application was late, was submitted to the Tax Assessor's Office.

Per general statute, a late application could be approved by the Board of Commissioners upon good cause. There was reportedly no definition of "good cause" and the Board would have to determine that in the matter of the late application. Tax Assessor Phillips reported that the letter from the property owner was provided in the agenda packet.

Chairman Smith asked the Board to review the letter from the property owner.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. mentioned that if someone passed away and property is turned over to someone else, there were processes within the court system, such as probate, that took time to conduct. Vice Chairman Bond Jr. added that the Tax Assessor's Office sent letters within 4 weeks and was concerned about the turnaround time for property owners to conduct court processes and respond to this matter. Vice Chairman Bond Jr. stated that there were similar appeals that were presented to the Board in the past, the Board voted to deny the appeals to prevent setting a precedent, and property owners were appealing the Board's decision at the State Level. Vice Chairman Bond Jr. asked if any of the appeals could be handled by the Tax Assessor's Office. Tax Assessor Phillips responded per statute, once an application was outside of the 60-day deadline for lack of continued use or out of the January deadline for a new application, the Tax Assessor's Office did not have the authority to approved the late applications. Per statute, the appeal had to be presented to the Board of Commissioners. Vice Chairman Bond Jr. then asked if the letters had been served, without follow up in 30 days, could the Tax Assessor's Office contact the property owners. Tax Assessor Phillips reported that the Office did not always have phone numbers or email addresses for taxpayers unless it was provided to the Tax Assessor's Office.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. stated that his opinion of the situation was that he could not support this late PUV application due to the past set precedent. Vice Chairman Bond Jr. stated that it was not fair.

Commissioner Gurganus stated that it did make the job harder in voting on these matters, especially this matter because the property owner was elderly and in his appeal letter, the property owner stated that he was dealing with the passing of his wife.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. asked if the appeal was approved, how much of a problem it would be to fix this issue. Tax Assessor Phillips reiterated the Boards options to approve or deny the late application, but nothing would come of it.

Commissioner Biggs asked if the late application was declined, if the property owners could reapply next year. Tax Assessor Phillips agreed and the property owners could also appeal the matter to the Property Tax Commission in Raleigh.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. asked if the property owners did appeal the matter to Raleigh, what the Property Tax Commission response would be. Tax Assessor Phillips stated that she did not know.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr., made the **Motion** to Deny the Late PUV Application Appeal, with a **Second** by Commissioner Biggs. **Discussion:** Chairman Smith stated in discussing deferred property taxes, the Board receives the appeal letters, and decision had to be made on a case by case basis. Chairman Smith asked how many appeals voted on by the Board of Commissioners, were appealed to the Property Tax Commission. Tax Assessor Phillips reported that the Property Tax Commission had not made any decisions on any appeals that were sent to them, but there were three pending cases. One appeal will not be heard because it was not properly appealed to the Property Tax Commission. Tax Assessor Phillips stated that property owners had 30 days to submit an appeal to the Property Tax Commission in Raleigh. The property owner would also have to send the Tax Assessor and the County Attorney copies of the appeal, the Tax Assessor's Office would receive notification of the hearing date 20 days prior to, and a preconference hearing can be conducted if there is any new information to add to the hearing before the Property Tax Commission would approve or deny the appeal.

Motion was Carried (2-3) – Ayes: Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr., and Commissioner Emily Biggs.

Nays: Chairman Ronnie Smith, Commissioner Joe R. Ayers, and Commissioner David "Skip" Gurganus

Albemarle Regional Solid Waste Management Authority

County Manager Bennett reported that Albemarle Regional Solid Waste Management Authority was a partnership of seventeen members. It consisted of (7) Counties and (8) Municipalities. It has been existence since 1992 with the purpose of providing environmentally sound, cost effective management of solid waste.

County Manager Bennett stated the County disposed approximately 9,459, 074 tons of solid waste annually at a cost of \$59.86 per ton. In order to join the authority, the existing members had to agree to allow Martin County to join. Martin County was reportedly given permission from the other members to join. The membership would allow the cost of tonnage to decrease to 56.00 per ton. County Manager Bennett informed the Board that membership would cost a onetime fee of 31, 191.00 to cover the next two fiscal years. The current members of the authority had to pay their dues as well when they joined. The membership would also require a onetime attorney fee of \$3,500.00 and an annual membership fee of \$4,000.00.

County Manager Bennett listed the estimated savings for the County if it were to join this authority:

- Estimated savings in the first year based on current tonnage would be \$3,744.10
- Estimated savings in the second year based on current tonnage would be \$7,279.60
- Estimated savings in the third year and there after based on current tonnage would be \$26,839.00

County Manager Bennett reported that this authority used Bertie County's landfill site and the membership would make it cheaper for Martin County to dispose of waste.

Chairman Smith asked for some of the Counties were that were already members of this authority. County Manager Bennett reported that Bertie, Washington, Pasquotank, and Perquimans, as well as eight municipalities. County Manager Bennett added that in speaking with the Washington County Manager whom was well pleased with the membership. It was reported that Green for Life (GFL) would still take the trash away for disposal to the landfill but at a cheaper cost.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. made the **Motion** to Approve Martin County joining the Albemarle Regional Solid Waste Management Authority, with a **Second** by Chairman Smith. Motion was **Carried** unanimously.

County Manager Bennett stated that he would make contact with the Albemarle Regional Solid Waste Management Authority Executive Director Ralph Hollowell tomorrow morning stating that the membership was approved by the Board.

Budget Amendment(s)

Budget Amendment #12

Budget Amendment #12 was tabled from a previous meeting. At the auditors request budget amendments for salary increases given after the fiscal year begins should be presented to the Board during the year instead of at the end of the year. Staff had been waiting to do an adjustment to the budget when it was clear that the department could not absorb the increase in the approved budget, which would be the end of the year. The Finance Department and the County Managers Department require increases in the budget based on increases given in August that staff calculates will not be absorbed in the current budget.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-12

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Administration		
County Manager	\$ 8,998	
Finance	\$ 1,884	

This will result in an increase of \$10,882 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide a decrease in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance

\$ 10,882

Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Commissioner Biggs made the **Motion** to Disapprove Budget Amendment #12, with a **Second** by Commissioner Gurganus. **Discussion:** Commissioner Ayers asked for clarification whether the motion was to approve or disapprove budget amendment #12. Commissioner Biggs agreed that she made the Motion to disapprove Budget Amendment #12. **Motion was Carried unanimously.**

Commissioner Biggs made a **Motion** to take back any salary increases for the month of August, September, and October 2023 and have the Finance Officer deduct any increases that occurred during that time for any other employees.

Finance Officer Ange asked if the motion was for all salary increase from August, September, and October to be reversed, Commissioner Biggs agreed.

Commissioner Gurganus asked for clarification on the motion as well and Commissioner Biggs stated for the salary increases for the months of August, September, and October to be deducted and any increases be taken from the salaries.

Chairman Smith asked for clarification regarding the increases being taken out of the next paycheck. Commissioner Biggs reported that the increases would be taken out of the October paycheck.

Chairman Smith clarified and reiterated the motion. Finance Officer Ange asked if this applied to all employees. Chairman Smith reported that the motion was in regards to Budget Amendment #12 and Budget Amendment #12 only referred to the County Manager's Office and Finance Office.

Vice Chairman Bond Jr. **Seconded** the original Motion made by Commissioner Biggs. **Discussion:** Commissioner Gurganus stated that he was fine with taking the County Manager's increase back because in his mind, it was never talked about, or at least three people stated that the Manager's increase wasn't talked about. Commissioner Gurganus did not feel like it was fair that Finance was caught up in the County Manager's business items, which happened often and made things confusing. Commissioner Gurganus stated that the person in the Finance Office likely deserved a raise if they got a raise, and to take it away from them unjustly because they were included in the County Manager's budget amendments was not fair.

Chairman Smith asked if the Finance Officer Ange if the Finance portion of the increases to the Budget Amendment #12 were reversed, if it could be brought back before the Board as a separate budget amendment.

Finance Officer Ange stated that she could prepare a budget amendment just for the Finance increase, but if this motion was passed, she would have to take away the increase from the employee who received it in October and give it back to that person when the budget amendment was approved.

Chairman Smith reported that the County Attorney informed him of a procedural motion that could be used to divide the Finance increase from the original motion.

Chairman Smith made the **Motion** to divide the Finance employee from original motion, with a **Second** from Commissioner Biggs. Motion was **Carried** Unanimously (5-0).

Chairman Smith asked for a vote to the original **Motion** made by Commissioner Biggs and **Seconded** by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. to take the August, September, and October increases and revert them back to the County from the October check. **Motion was Carried Unanimously (5-0)**

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Budget Amendment # 13

On September 13, 2023, the bankruptcy trustee for Williamston Hospital Corporation filed a motion to reject the unexpired lease with Martin County. The hearing for the motion is to be held on October 11, 2023 and if accepted will reject the lease as of the day of the motion, September 13. As such, County staff have been working towards the County being responsible for the hospital building and the other buildings on the hospital campus. As such, the County will begin incurring expenses immediately for the upkeep of the facilities. Staff has estimated some of the expenditures based on information from former hospital staff and vendors.

Finance Officer Cindy Ange stated the amendment included in this amendment are funds for the remaining fiscal year for salary for the part time maintenance position, electricity, water, insurance on the buildings and contents, security for the building, pest control and maintenance items like cutting the grass, changing the locks, purchasing 2 dehumidifiers for the stairwells, repairing the roof leak in the emergency department, and fixing the sink hole near the chiller.

Chairman Smith reported that the County within the last twenty-four hours would have ownership of Martin General Hospital as far as the complex and the property. Chairman Smith stated that in the process of owning the hospital, it was found in a feasibility study that there was a lot of neglect and that Qourum did not provide the care. Chairman Smith reported that the County took over the stewardship of the hospital last week. It was also reported that the County Commissioners were not able to go into the hospital since 1998 because the hospital was a private entity such as Wal – Mart. The \$621,000.00 was stated to take care of several issues with the hospital and there may be another request for additional funds to maintain the hospitals until a hospital operator is operating the hospital. Chairman Smiths stated that this was a complex matter and many of the Martin County citizens wanted the hospital opened and the County did as well. Chairman Smith asked County Manager Bennett how much it would take to get the hospital in good condition.

County Manager Bennett reported that when Ascendient Health Care Advisors conducted a feasibility study, it was founded that the hospital was not up to code. It was reported to be around \$15 million or more to bring the hospital back up to code and County Manager Bennett asked for confirmation on this figure from Commissioner Gurganus.

Commissioner Gurganus reported that Ascendient Consultant Dawn Carter’s exact words were that the building was a decent building, but it was not a good building for a hospital. It would take between \$ 7 – 9 million to bring the building back up to code and that did not include the asbestos

in the sheetrock that could cause a big abatement process if it needed to be modified. Commissioner Gurganus stated that there was a Commissioner that was on the Hospital Board and was asleep at the switch for 25 years. Commissioner Gurganus stated that the County did have the right to enter the building and the ability to push back at whomever was renting the building and doing whatever they were doing. Commissioner Gurganus felt that it was assumed that the hospital operators were doing the right thing. This was a fair assumption since the hospital operators who were supposed to be doing the right thing. Commissioner Gurganus stated that he was not making these comments in a bad sense of any Commissioners then or now. It came to Commissioner Gurganus' attention, after being assigned to a Board for four months, that there were issues with the hospital. Commissioner Gurganus stated that he brought the issues to the attention of the Commissioners. However, Commissioner Gurganus stated the hospital was a County asset and it couldn't just go to waste. Commissioner Gurganus reported that it was unknown what the hospital situation was going to look like when it was done, but it was the best interest to preserve the asset in the best of ability in case someone or something utilizes the hospital. Commissioner Gurganus stated the County needed to spend funding to keep the hospital going for now as majority of the infrastructure in the building were at the end of their life.

Chairman Smith made comments regarding the importance of medical services and the hospital as people would die if they could not receive those services. Chairman Smith talked about the deterioration of the hospital was very expensive and the County was very cautious in accepting a term sheet when the County did not have the financial means.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-13

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
General Government		
Buildings	\$ 466,128	

This will result in an increase of \$466,128 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance Appropriation	\$ 466,128
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

All Board members voted unanimously to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023.

Budget Amendment # 14

Last fiscal year, the NC Department of Health and Human Services reportedly awarded Martin County Department of Social Services \$10,728 from the Adoption Promotion Program Fund.

Legislation regarding these funds requires the funds to be used to enhance adoption services promotion. These funds were not expended in the prior fiscal year, and therefore need to be re-appropriated to be used in fiscal year 2024.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-14

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Human Services		
Social Services	\$ 10,728	

This will result in an increase of \$10,728 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance Appropriation	\$ 10,728
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Gurganus and **seconded** by Vice Chairman Bond Jr., to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0)

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Budget Amendment # 15

In 2021 the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has allocated \$100,000 to Martin County Soil and Water District to conduct vegetative debris removal in streams in Martin County. The County has \$13,642.00 remaining in that allocation to expend in the current year.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-15

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Economic & Physical Development		
Soil and Water	\$ 13,642	

This will result in an increase of \$13,642.00 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Restricted Intergovernmental \$ 13,642

Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Gurganus and **seconded** by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0)

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Budget Amendment # 16

The Bargain Shop building has had a several roof leaks over the last years. Another leak was detected in early September and a more extensive repair was needed to make the building water tight. The water had done damage to interior walls and the floors. The carpet was removed and the floors were stripped and waxed. County maintenance staff and Department of Aging staff worked to repair much of the damage themselves in order to keep costs at a minimum. We have estimated the total cost to repair the damage to the building to be \$20,000.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-16

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
General Government		
Buildings	\$ 20,000	

This will result in an increase of \$20,000 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance Appropriation	\$ 20,000
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Ayers and **seconded** by Commissioner Biggs to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion **Carried** unanimously (5-0)

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Budget Amendment # 17

The landfill has had two major equipment breakdowns. The Caterpillar trash compactor and the bulldozer have both been in the repair shop. The cost of the Caterpillar repair is \$29,000. The estimate for the bulldozer is \$40,000. Staff is seeking some relief on the bulldozer with the warranty, but it has not been determined yet that the repair qualifies as warranty work.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-17

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Environmental Protection		
Landfill	\$ 69,000	

This will result in an increase of \$69,000 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance Appropriation	\$ 69,000
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Gurganus and **seconded** by Commissioner Biggs to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0).

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Budget Amendment # 18

The Martin County Board of Commissioners approved a 4% raise for all DSS employees except the director at the September 27, 2023 meeting. DSS employee salaries are partially paid for by the State and Federal government. This amendment will result in \$108,863 dollars in additional salary and benefits with only \$47,570 coming from county funds.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-18

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Human Services		
DSS	\$ 108,863	

This will result in an increase of \$108,863 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance Appropriation	\$ 47,570
Intergovernmental Revenue	\$ 61,293

Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. and **seconded** by Commissioner Biggs to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0).

Budget Amendment # 19 & # 20

Health insurance for Martin County employees is provided through the State Health Plan. The plan runs on a calendar year, and therefore when the County is preparing the budget in the spring, we estimate how much the increase will be for the plan beginning the following January. For the current year, the County estimated and budgeted a 5% increase. The increase beginning January will actually be 15%.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-19

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
General Government	\$12,127.00	
Public Safety	\$20,272.00	
Environmental Protection	\$ 1,267.00	
Economic & Physical Development	\$ 724.00	
Human Services	\$22,081.00	
Transportation	\$ 3,982.00	
Water	\$ 905.00	

This will result in an increase of \$61,358 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance Appropriation	\$ 61,358
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Gurganus and **seconded** by Commissioner Ayers to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0).

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-20

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the Water District #2 fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Water District		
Water District #2	\$ 905.00	

This will result in an increase of \$905.00 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Water Sales Shortage	\$ 905.00
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Gurganus and **seconded** by Commissioner Ayers to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0)

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Budget Amendment # 21

There is an increase in salary for the Emergency Management Department. This amendment reflects salary and benefits for 75% or the remainder of the year.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-21

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Public Safety		
Emergency Mgmt.	\$ 4,062	

This will result in an increase of \$4,062 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide a decrease in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance	\$ 4,062
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Gurganus and **seconded** by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0).

Budget Amendment # 22 & # 23

Each year when we are invoiced for workers compensation insurance the invoice is based on an estimate of factors including salaries, rates for positions, and the county's experience modifier. After the conclusion of the year, an audit is conducted to reconcile the estimate we paid to an actual amount. Some years the County is given a refund for an overpayment and sometimes, like this year, we are required to pay an additional amount.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-22

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
General Government		
County Manager	\$ 158	
Tax Assessor	\$ 86	
Tax Collector	\$ 167	
Register of Deeds	\$ 88	
Buildings	\$ 2,166	
Public Safety		
Sheriff	\$ 2,898	
Transportation		
Transit		\$ 1,940
Environmental Protection		
Landfill		\$ 827
Economic Development		
Economic Development	\$ 189	
Human Resources		
DSS	\$ 658	
Aging	\$1,318	
Water		
Water District #2	\$ 736	

This will result in an increase of \$5,697 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide a decrease in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Fund Balance	\$ 5,697
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Commissioner Ayers to divide, under Amendment # 22 - General Government, divide County Manager \$158.00, with a **Second** by Commissioner Gurganus. Motion **was not Carried (2-3): Ayes:** Commissioner Joe R. Ayers and Commissioner David “Skip” Gurganus
Nays: Chairman Ronnie Smith, Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr., and Commissioner Emily Biggs.

Finance Officer Cindy Ange was asked to read Budget Amendment #23 aloud again and Finance Officer Ange reiterated the amendment. Chairman Smith asked Commissioner Ayers what he wanted to divide. Commissioner Ayers stated under Budget Amendment # 22, under General Government – County Manager, that there was an increase of \$158.00. Commissioner Ayers reported that his motion was to divide or take it out.

Chairman Smith asked Finance Officer Ange how this could be done and Finance Officer Ange stated that she could not. County Manager Bennett and Chairman Smith reported that the \$158.00 was not an increase for the individual that was the County Manager, but the County Manager position itself.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-23

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the Water District #2 Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Water District		
Water District #2	\$ 736	

This will result in an increase of \$736 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Water Sales Shortage	\$ 736
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Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. and **seconded** by Commissioner Ayers to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0).

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Budget Amendment # 24

At the September 27, 2023 the Board of Commissioners agreed to join the Albemarle Solid Waste Authority, a county-level legal entity currently serving the counties of Perquimans, Chowan, Gates, Dare, Currituck, Hyde, Tyrrell, and Washington. Joining the authority will give the County reduced rates at the East Carolina Environmental Landfill. The Authority requires the County to

buy in at a rate of \$39,191. Also, in the first year the county will be charged attorney fees that were estimated at \$3,500 for the County to join. An annual fee estimated at \$4,000 will be paid each year.

The Authority has agreed to allow Martin County to pay the buy in amount in two fiscal years or \$19,596 per year. Using our current tonnage of waste taken to East Carolina Environmental Landfill and the current rates, the county could save about \$26,000 per year on disposal after the first two years.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-24

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Martin County, North Carolina, that the following amendments be made to the annual budget ordinance for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024.

Section 1. To amend the General Fund, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Environmental Protection		
Landfill	\$ 27,096	
This will result in an increase of \$27,096 in the expenditures of the General Fund. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.		
Fund Balance Appropriation	\$ 27,096	

Section 2. Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board and to the Finance Officer for their direction.

Motion by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. and **seconded** by Chairman Smith to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 11th day of October 2023. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0).

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Commissioner Gurganus wanted to discuss concerns with Budget Amendment # 13 as Chairman Smith made a comment that made him wonder about somethings. Commissioner Gurganus reported that it was stated earlier in the meeting that the Board did not make contact with Qourum within 12 days. Commissioner Gurganus added that it was in the paper that there was no contact from the County from Qourum. Commissioner Gurganus wondered what would have happened if the County gave a half of a million dollars from the Hospital Fund to Qourum to keep the Emergency Room open for a while.

Chairman Smith reported on how much money Qourum stated that they were losing in operating Martin General Hospital; which was \$1 million a month, \$ 13 million last year and the year before then, and those two years together was around \$22 million. Therefore, a half of a million dollars was not going to fix the issue. Chairman Smith stated that once someone filed for bankruptcy, they had to have a pattern of losses in order to file a case. Qourum reportedly started building their data many months or even years ago to show their losses. From what their losses were, Chairman Smith felt that Qourum had no intent of staying at Martin General. Lastly, Chairman Smith reported that Qourum had 38 hospitals in 2016. At that time Qourum “spinned off” from Community Health Systems (CHS), they were in 19 states, and in 2020, Qourum had 23 hospitals. Martin County was

reportedly the last hospital left in North Carolina being operated by Qourum. Alleghany County and the Beaufort County Manager had a conversation with Chairman Smith and informed him that they kicked Qourum out of their hospital because Qourum cut their services. Chairman Smith stated that Qourum wanted to get out of North Carolina and filed bankruptcy in 2022 in Delaware. It was reported that when Qourum began to shrink, their goal was to get out of the business. Unfortunately, Martin General was one of the hospitals that Qourum had to dissolve and Chairman Smith stated this information could be looked up on the internet.

CLOSED SESSION(S) - 1. NC G.S. § 143-318.11(5) Contracts/ Agreements and 2. NC G.S. § 143-318.11(6) Personnel

Vice Chairman Bond Jr., made a **Motion** to Enter Closed Sessions 1. NC G.S. § 143-318.11(5) Contracts/ Agreements and 2. NC G.S. § 143-318.11(6) Personnel, with a **Second** by Commissioner Biggs. Motion was **Carried** Unanimously (5-0).

Commissioner Ayers made a **Motion** to Enter Closed Sessions 1. NC G.S. § 143-318.11(5) Contracts/ Agreements and 2. NC G.S. § 143-318.11(6) Personnel, with a **Second** by Commissioner Biggs. Motion was **Carried** Unanimously (5-0).

OPEN SESSION

104 Medical Drive – Williamston Medical P.L.L.C.,

Chairman Smith reported on a lease of property that was also part of the County hospital properties. The property was 104 Medical Drive and the Board would be going into a lease agreement with Dr. Chawla's organization at the 104 Medical Drive address to open a clinic. A vote was needed to move forward with negotiations.

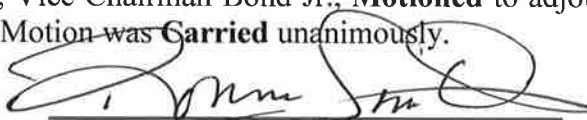
Commissioner Gurganus made the **Motion** to enter negotiations and move forward with the lease, with a **Second** by Commissioners Ayers. Motion was **Carried** unanimously (5-0).

BOARD REPORTS / COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

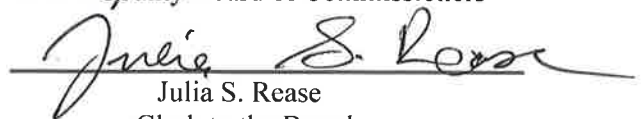
Manager Bennett thanked Vice Chairman Bond Jr. for bringing a 2023 Map Book back from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Annual Conference, which contained demographics for each county within North Carolina. Manager Bennett reported that a copy of the map book was also in the Board agenda packets.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, at 9:30 pm, Vice Chairman Bond Jr., **Motioned** to adjourn and Commissioner Biggs **Seconded** the motion. Motion was **Carried** unanimously.



Ronnie Smith, Chairman
Martin County Board of Commissioners



Julia S. Rease
Clerk to the Board