

January 10, 2024 Regular

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular meeting on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioner's Boardroom at the Martin County Governmental Center, 305 East Main Street, Williamston, North Carolina.

ASSEMBLY

Present in the Boardroom: Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr., Vice Chair Emily Biggs, Commissioner Joe. R. Ayers, Commissioner Ronnie Smith, and Commissioner David "Skip" Gurganus, Interim County Manager/ County Attorney Benjamin R. Eisner, Clerk to the Board Julia Rease, and Finance Officer Cindy Ange.

Others Present: Town of Williamston Mayor Dean McCall, Town of Williamston Mayor Pro Tem Alton Moore, Town of Williamston Administrator Eric Pearson, Town of Bear Grass Mayor Charlotte Griffin, Town of Robersonville Mayor Tina Brown, Town of Hamilton Mayor Ervin Williams

Chairman Bond Jr. called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. Vice Chair Biggs led the Pledge of Allegiance and Commissioner Gurganus provided the invocation.

Chairman Bond Jr. extended a welcome to all in attendance. Chairman Bond Jr. announced that there were technical difficulties wherein the Facebook Live was not streaming. IT submitted a work request to resolve the issue. Chairman Bond Jr. also asked that the audience were respectful.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Chairman Bond Jr. asked that:

- Move #2. Public Address to the Board and #3 Public Comments to New Business as #10 and #11.
- Table the CADA Board appointment listed as #8 under New Business, until February.

Commissioner Smith made the **Motion** to Approve the agenda with stated changes, with a **Second** by Commissioner Biggs. Motion was **Carried** 3-2 by raise of hand.

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

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

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda made by Commissioner Smith with a **Second** by Commissioner Biggs. Motion was **Carried** unanimously by raise of hand.

1. Minute Approval

- August 21, 2023 Special (Tabled from Last Meeting)
- September 13, 2023 Closed
- September 27, 2023 Special

2. Financial Report – December 2023

3. Tax Assessor – Tax Refund Request – December 2023 - \$0.00

4. Tax Assessor – Tax Relief Orders – December 2023 – \$27,005.31

(\$1,037.67 of the \$27,005.31 were from the State Auditor’s Report filed reviews and in – house reviews.)

Year Levy	Lname	Fname	Reason	Value	Total
2021	Aponte	Trisha and Noel	Error In Value - State Audit	\$3,620	\$29.33
2022	Aponte	Trisha and Noel	Error In Value – State Audit	\$39,720	\$321.74
2023	Aponte	Trisha and Noel	Error In Value – State Audit	\$39,720	\$321.74
2022	Carter	Timothy S.	Error In Value – State Audit	\$20,850	\$182.43
2023	Carter	Timothy S.	Error In Value – State Audit	\$20,850	\$182.43
2023	Griffin	Joseph S.	Shouldn’t have SW1 Fee	\$0.00	\$195.00
2023	Griffin	Joseph S.	Shouldn’t have SW1 Fee	\$0.00	\$195.00
2023	LLC.	Little Dumas	Tax Assessor Clerk Error	\$10,690	\$161.42
2023	LLC.	Little Dumas	Tax Assessor Clerk Error	\$14,770	\$223.03
2023	LLC.	Little Dumas	Tax Assessor Clerk Error	\$2,330	\$35.18
2023	Mansau	Johnathan	Double Billed	\$0.00	\$31.29
2023	Middlekauff	Jason William	Error in Listing	\$0.00	\$990.19
2023	Perry	Margaret Candace	Court Order - PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,471.38
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order – PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,471.38
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order – PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,308.24
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order –PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,308.24
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order –PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$831.54
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order –PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$831.54
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order - PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$356.96
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order –PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$330.73
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,978.26
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order – PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,920.21
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,471.38
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order –PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,308.24
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order –PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$831.54
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order-PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$356.96
2023	Perry	Margaret, Candace	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,978.26
2023	Farms, LLC.	Seth & Rachel Perry	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,471.38
2023	Farms, LLC.	Seth & Rachel Perry	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$1,308.24
2023	Farms, LLC.	Seth & Rachel Perry	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$831.54
2023	Farms, LLC.	Seth & Rachel Perry	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$337.96
2023	Farms, LLC.	Seth & Rachel Perry	Court Order- PTC Hearing	\$0.00	\$2,042.55
2023	Shepherd	Gregory & Anne B	SW Fee Count- Bus has dumpste	\$0.00	\$195.00
2023	Shepherd	Gregory & Anne B.	SW Fee Count-Bus has dumpste	\$0.00	\$195.00
		Total Real & Personal Releases			\$ 27,005.31
		Total VTS Refunds			\$0.00
		Total Tax Relief Orders			\$27,005.31

5. Tax Collector's Report – December 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

6. Board Appointments/Reappointments

Transportation Advisory Board

The Transportation Advisory Board had several recommendations for reappointments and one appointment. The recommended reappointments/appointment are as listed:

Cindy Ange/County Manager
Jody Griffin/Emergency Management
Madison Wilkinson/Adult & Aging
Judy Jeanette/Martin Community College Dean
Eric Manning/Martin Enterprises
Vickey Manning/MTW District Health Department
Bernadette Rodgers/Smiling Faces Day Care
Yvonne Knott/Social Services
Diana Ortega/ Social Services
Frank Halsey/ Social Services Transit
Dempsey Bond Jr./Commissioner Rep.
Jerry McCrary/ DSS Board Rep.

NC Works Career Center Representative Callie Northern-Herring was recommended for appointment to fill the unexpired NC Works term.

The Board Approved the above reappointments and appointment as part of the consent agenda. End of Board Appointments.

Choanoke Area Development Association (CADA) 2024 -2025 Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) Anti –Poverty Work Plan

CADA provided the Board with a copy of their 2024-2025 CSBG Anti – Poverty Work Plan. In the past years, the CSBG work plan had been accompanied by an affidavit that required a signature. This year, the affidavit was not required, but CADA provided a copy to the Board members for their information. The work plan can be reviewed by request made to the Clerk.

The Board Approved the above reappointments as part of the consent agenda.

New Title VI Program Plan for Martin County Transit

The North Carolina Department of Transportation Integrated Mobility Division (NCDOT-IMD) established several requirements for local public transportation agencies. One requirement was the adoption of a current Title VI Program Plan. The adoption of the current plan would become a part of the SSP Manual Section 10. Section 10 is the Martin County Transit (MCT) Operational Handbook.

Martin County Transit was contacted by Shirley Mikkelsen with the NCDOT-IMD about the need to incorporate the newest template version of the Title VI Program Plan into the daily operation of MCT. Shirley Mikkelsen provided the current template for this new Title VI Program Plan. The proposed Title VI Program Plan template was completed by the MCT Administrative Officer. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) representative also reviewed and approved the revisions to this proposed Title VI Program Plan. The OCR representative instructed that the revised plan be made available to the Board of Commissioners for requested adoption. The Title VI Plan can be reviewed by request made to the Clerk.

The Board Approved the New Title VI Program Plan for Martin County Transit as part of the consent agenda.

7. Clerk Report- *included for informational purposes*

INTRODUCTION OF NEW EMPLOYEE(S)

Every month, new employees of Martin County are introduced to the Board. The following employees began their employment with Martin County in the month of January:

1. MacKenzi Wolff, Telecommunicator I
2. Dorothy Cherry – Register of Deeds
3. Sidney Sparrow – Income Maintenance Caseworker I - DSS
4. Lindsey Sexton – Income Maintenance Caseworker I - DSS
5. Solessa Morgan – Income Maintenance Caseworker II - DSS
6. Kiara Williams - Income Maintenance-DSS

Employees were thanked for choosing Martin County and welcomed by the Board.

PRESENTATION (S)

Update on Potential Long-Term Healthcare Solutions Martin County - Ascendient Health Advisors Consultant Dawn Carter

Ascendient Health Advisors Consultant Dawn Carter stated a team of advisors met twice a week since October to discuss the process of achieving healthcare in Martin County. Updates were reportedly shared on the Ascendient Health Advisors website (www.martincohealth.com), the County website (www.martincountyncgov.com), and County Facebook page weekly/bi-weekly.

Medical Records

Ascendient Consultant Carter explained the Bankruptcy trustee controlled and was responsible for medical records. The County and legal team reportedly negotiated with the bankruptcy trustee and prevented the destruction of the medical records by authorizing a company called ShareCare to handle the storage process for paper records. ShareCare would also process the medical records to be accessed electronically. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that instructions were posted to the Ascendient website and the bankruptcy trustee's website (martingeneral.com) to obtain medical records

Updates on Progress Made

Ascendient Consultant Carter asked County Attorney/Interim County Manager Benjamin Eisner to give an update first regarding the Proof of Claim process underway with the hospital and related to the bankruptcy case. County Attorney Eisner reported that a Proof of Claim filing had to be submitted by December 10, 2023 if anyone felt that they had a claim in regards to the hospital. The County reportedly filed a proof of claim in a timely manner. With these filings, it was stated that the Bankruptcy Trustee had to review each claim, file objections, and determine their amounts. County Attorney Eisner advised that if anyone had a claim to file and hadn't done so, would need to consult with their attorney to see if there was any recourse.

Secondly, Ascendient Consultant Carter reported on two areas being worked on since the last update in October 2023, besides a separate team working on the medical records. These areas were:

- Discussions with the various government agencies involved in healthcare

Ascendient Consultant Carter mentioned health care and hospitals being a highly regulated industry with various layers, governmental regulatory bodies, and entities involved. Such agencies were stated to be the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Division of Health Service Regulations Board, Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Representatives (CMS), the rule writers for the REH Designation, and more. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that it was important to discuss and work with these government entities to bring healthcare to Martin County with the best results. It was also important due to the fact that Martin County was reportedly the first and only County in North Carolina and the United States to attempt to apply the REH designation to a closed hospital. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the REH Designation was new to North Carolina, but it was very new to apply it to a closed hospital. In working with the stated government agencies, Ascendient Consultant Carter felt that the entities were positive in moving forward with assisting Martin County in this uncharted territory. The current condition and needs of the hospital were being discussed in meetings as well.

- Discussions with various health operators.

Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that discussions were had occurred with a dozen of hospital operators that showed significant interest in operating Martin General Hospital. When an operator expresses interest, Ascendient Health Consultants reportedly meets with them to review the current situation, explore their interest in providing health care in Martin County and needs, and go into a confidentiality agreement with the interested party. The interested parties were reportedly receiving updates as well and Ascendient Consultant Carter sent an update to them recently. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that the interested parties signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA), to protect the best interest. It was ensured that updates would be given to the public in some manner, but confidentiality and a competitive process were important in finding an operator. A public bidding process was reported to take place when selecting a hospital operator to meet statutory requirements and eliminate any bias. A submittal of Request for Proposals (RFP) will be

required to the Board, before the bidding. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that there were many questions, specifics, and logistics that needed to be resolved to move forward. The process of finding a hospital operator was reportedly time consuming and complex due to the REH Designation being new and hadn't been applied to a closed hospital; collaboration occurring with entities at the local, state, and federal levels to resolve logistics, and working with the bankruptcy trustee in the bankruptcy case, as well as the various potential hospital operators

Logistics of Implementing the REH Designation

Next, Ascendient Consultant Carter discussed the facts in regards to the REH Designation. The designation was stated to be a viable and sustainable hospital model for Martin General and there were several operators interested in operating MGH as a REH. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the REH Designation being passed was only possible due to the Board of Commissioners and their efforts to submit the REH designation into the budget. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the progress of resolving the hospital issue would not have gotten thus far without the efforts of the Board of Commissioners. The state budget, which included the REH Designation, was passed in September of 2023. Other efforts of communication to the state inquiring of help was mentioned as a

Ascendient Consultant Carter explained that the logistics of reopening Martin General Hospital was depending on some major questions such as; how to reopen a closed hospital under the REH Designation, what was needed for the hospital, and if the hospital needed funding for capital needs. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that the REH Designation was new and regulations were being written, as there were no other REH hospitals in North Carolina. Medicaid and Medicare representatives were not aware of any hospital that was qualified upon federal regulations or closed and reopened as a REH. Even though this was a new process for state and federal stakeholders, it was reported that they were helpful, diligent, and prepared when meeting with Ascendient Health Advisors. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was reportedly attending the meetings with Ascendient Health Advisors as well and were paying attention. As of yesterday, Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that there were about 15 DHHS representatives on a call with Ascendient Health Advisors and a few federal representatives yesterday. On that conference call, the Federal representatives did not have immediate answers in regards to implementing the REH designation to Martin General. This was due to the REH designation being new. Regardless, Ascendient Consultant Carter added that the process was being mapped out and the Ascendient Consultant group were talking with the right representatives, whom were responsible in processing the applications for REH designations. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated as answers were received from the federal and state levels, depending on what those answers were, interfacing may be required with the bankruptcy trustee to move forward.

- Question 1: How to Apply the REH Designation from a Regulatory Perspective? The answer would be needed to present to potential parties. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that it was normally less complicated to convert an existing operating hospital to a different status. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that since Qorum closed the hospital, the requirements to reopen the hospital were different and more extensive.
- Question 2: What if anything needed to be done to the current hospital building, before it could be reopened? Architects were reportedly contacted to review building plans and would meet with state construction representatives, whom were waiting on answers from the federal government, before moving forward. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that the architects were being sent to work with the state construction representatives. The architects and State

Representatives would go over drawings to come up with options and find what was needed to be done to the building. Parties that were reportedly interested in operating the hospital, needed to know what needed to be done to the hospital building before they submit a proposal.

- Question 3: Are there going to be capital needs and what capital funding options are available? Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that the hospital industry were capital insensitive businesses. It was reported to be good news that the state had a lot of interest in rural healthcare at the time. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that the question was if the states interest would line up with the needs of Martin County. Ascendient Consultant Carter was reportedly working on a listing of possible funding options to apply to the capital needs of Martin General Hospital when those needs are known.

Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that once these questions were answered, a Request for Proposal (RFP) would be issued from all the interested parties and anyone else who was interested in providing healthcare in Martin County. It was reiterated that although those parties and the County were under a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) right now, NC law required any lease, sale, or conveyance of county hospital property had to go through a public bid process. This process required open meetings, public hearings, and agreements and documents available for the public to view. The process was stated to be open and the public would know information about the interested parties, but that process had not begun yet.

Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that Martin County was the first in the Country to reopen a general acute hospital as an REH. It was unknown if all potential parties wanted to operate the hospital as an REH, but there were some. The only county in the timeline for all processes were unknown at this time. The process was supposedly going to move more rapid that in the last past months. Ascendient Consultant Carter ensured her teams' efforts in doing what they could to provide healthcare to the community. Ascendient Consultant Carter also expressed sympathy for the community since the closing of Martin General Hospital.

Chairman Bond Jr. thanked Ascendient Consultant Carter and asked if there were any questions. Commissioner Gurganus asked for clarification of his understanding using an analogy. Ascendient Consultant Carter responded that Commissioner Gurganus' understanding was correct. Commissioner Gurganus thanked Ascendient Carter for her and her efforts to assist the county in the hospital matter.

Commissioner Ayers stated that he was disappointed hearing about the possible "stumbling block" that may come with the REH possibility and having to reopen. Commissioner Ayers asked Ascendient Consultant Carter what her opinion was in regards to the state and federal regulations. Ascendient Consultant Carter responded that the federal law allows a closed hospital to open as an REH as long as it was in operation December 27, 2020. It was unknown if there were any regulations that would be required of the County. There were reportedly technical issues around this law, but Ascendient Consultant stated that the REH model should be a possible solution.

Commissioner Gurganus asked if it were true that once the REH legislature was passed and the model was allowed in North Carolina, a body of work was needed to be completed before the REH could be implemented. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated that this was being figured out. The combination of hospital rules and Medicare/Medicaid rules were being reviewed.

Commissioner Smith stated that he was hearing that Martin County was the first County in the nation to try to open REH. Ascendient Consultant Carter stated the County was the first in the nation to open a closed hospital as a REH. Commissioner Smith asked if the amount of hospitals that had transitioned to REH statuses. Ascendient Consultant Carter reported that there was less than a dozen in the United States. Commissioner Smith mentioned that there was a hospital provider in Martin County that wanted to leave. Commissioner Smith asked if the County could have converted the hospital to an REH status if that provider was not interested in operating an REH. Ascendient Consultant Carter responded that the operator had to be willing to operate the hospital as an REH. Consultant Carter reiterated that progress would not been made without the legislature from the State.

There were no further questions and or comments. Ascendient Consultant Carter was thanked for her presentation and efforts before leaving the meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING – School Street, Robersonville, NC - Abandonment Petition

At 7:39 p.m., Commissioner Gurganus made the Motion to Enter Public Hearing – School Street, Robersonville, NC- Abandonment Petition, with a Second by Vice Chair Biggs. Motion was Carried unanimously by raise of hand.

A Martin County resident submitted an abandonment petition for School Street in Robersonville, NC. The property owner reported that he own the two properties that School Street was in between. The property owner also stated that individuals would vandalize and put trash on his property. The property owner submitted the abandonment petition to remove the street from the NCDOT state maintained system. This would allow the property owner to block or close off the street to prevent further nuisances from individuals. In last month’s meeting, the Board approved of a resolution in support of the abandonment petition. This month, the Board was required to hold a Public Hearing to hear any comments/concerns from the public regarding the matter.

A Public Hearing Signup Sheet was provided beside the meeting agendas and regular public comment signup sheet before the meeting began. There were no comments/concerns listed on the sign up sheet and there were none during the public comment section by the public.

Commissioner Smith informed the Board of his knowledge of the property and property owner. Commissioner Smith stated that there had been issues with thief and individuals vandalizing he property. Commissioner Smith thought that it was a good idea to abandon School Street from the state Maintained system to prevent further issues.

No further comments were presented.

At: 7:41 p.m., Commissioner Gurganus made the Motion to Exit Public Hearing –School Street, Robersonville, NC –Abandonment Petition, with a Second by Commissioner Smith. Motion was Carried unanimously by raise of hand.

OLD BUSINESS

Tax Assessor’s Discovery Appeal (Tabled from Last Month’s Meeting)

At the December 2023 Regular Board of Commissioner’s meeting, a discovery appeal was presented by the Tax Assessor’s Office. Tax Assessor Melissa Phillips presented the matter to the Board and the property owner was in attendance to state his explanation. This matter was tabled to be presented again in the January 2024 regular meeting.

Tax Assessor Phillips presented the matter to the Board with new documents from the North Carolina Department of Revenue (NCDOR). Tax Assessor Phillips reminded the Board that the property owner went to the Tax Assessor’s Office to inquire about a tax deduction for his father whom was a veteran. During the visit, a discovery was made about the parcel having two properties on it that were both receiving a tax deduction.

There was discussion between Tax Assessor Phillips, Board members, and County Attorney Eisner regarding technicalities of general statutes and how they could contradict each other. Tax Assessor Phillips gave the Board clarity on these general statutes.

Commissioner Smith made the Motion to approve the appeal to forgive the last 6 years of taxes according to N.C.G.S. 105-315, with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus. Motion was Carried unanimously by raise of hand.

CADA Board Appointment – Tabled until February 2024

This agenda item was **tabled** until February 2024.

NEW BUSINESS

Southern Albemarle Association (SAA) 2024 Transportation Project Listing and Executive Committee Listing

Chairman Bond Jr. reported that the Southern Albemarle Association (SAA) began in 1935 and began projects related to roads, highways, waterways, and other modes of transportation before moving forward with the implementation. Martin County was reportedly a member of the Southern Albemarle Association. An Executive listing of members as well as a list of transportation projects for 2024. Chairman Bond Jr. reported that the last three presidents were from Martin County who were Carolyn Harrell, Mayor of Bear Grass Charlotte Griffin, and Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr. The Executive Committee and Transportation projects for 2024 are as listed:

*Southern Albemarle Association - 2024
Executive Committee - Martin County, North Carolina*

Carolyn Harrell	Vice President
Charlotte Griffin	Roads and Bridges
Beulah Bennett	Airports
Milton Bennett	Ferries and Waterways
Lula Council	Publicity
Janie Grady	Finance
Jerry Harrell	Roadsides and Parks
Don Grady	Ferries and Waterways
Tonya Leggett	History
Joe Ayers	Airports

Chase Conner
Mayor Tina Brown
Dempsey Bond

Rules
Publicity
Roads and Bridges

Past SAA Presidents from Martin County:

Charlotte Griffin Bowen
Dempsey Bond
Carolyn Harrell

*2024 Transportation Projects List – Martin County, North Carolina
Southern Albemarle Association*

- US Hwy I-87 construction along existing US Hwy 64 corridor from Raleigh to Rocky Mount to Williamston to Elizabeth City into Hampton Roads-Norfolk, Virginia area.
- Hwy 17 construction of four lanes from Beaufort County to the existing four lanes in Martin County.
- Completion of all four lanes sections on US 17 corridor within North Carolina to the border.
- Install lighting at the exit ramp off US Hwy 17 at Williamston.
- Complete the upgrade of Prison Camp Road so NC Hwy 125 designation can be extended to NC Hwy 903.
- Install lighting at entrance and exit ramps onto US Hwy 64 from NC Hwy 125.
- US Hwy 64 construct exit ramp at Dixon Road to facilitate access to the town of Parmele.
- Construct a connecting road from Twin Bridges Road SR 1405 to Airport Road SR 1404 to provide a second form of ingress and egress for the Martin County Regional Industrial Park.
- Widen SR 1159 (3rd Street Extension) Robersonville Products Road from US Hwy 64 to NC 903. We are asking to widen the road from 20 to 28 feet and to strengthen the pavement to better accommodate trucks.
- Install sidewalks and curb ramps along the west side of Washington Street between the drainage ditch and easement limits (from Garrett Road to Peele Street}.
- Highway 11 improvements from Bethel to the Roanoke River.
- New road and properties from the Martin County Airport to the Industrial Park.
- US Hwy 17 and Williamston Main Street intersection safety upgrades.
- US Hwy 17 and Bear Grass Road intersection safety upgrades.
- Repair and resurface State Road 1138 from Intersection of Everetts Rd and Ed's Grocery Rd to Prison Camp Rd.
- Repair and resurfacing of State Road 1336 - David Brown Road.
- Repair and resurfacing of State Road 1002 – Commerce Street – 1/8 of mile.

There were no additions or corrections to the listings provided by the Southern Albemarle Association.

Commissioner Gurganus made a Motion to Approve the Southern Albemarle Association Executive Committee and Transportation Project listings for 2024, with a Second by Commissioner Smith. Motion was Carried unanimously by raise of hands (5-0).

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

Interim County Manager Eisner reported that Dr. Chawla was interested in leasing and had been working to reopen one of the former Martin General Hospital clinics.

Dr. Chawla stated that his clinic would be a General Medical Clinic providing Primary Care, Geriatrics, and Nephrology. It was Dr. Chawla's goal to provide Pharmacy services at a later date. Dr. Chawla admitted that he knew the healthcare side of running a clinic, but was not aware of all financial/business aspects that were required in running a clinic. Dr. Chawla stated that he tried to handle everything on his own in opening the clinic, but received support from Washington Regional Medical Hospital in Plymouth, NC. Dr. Chawla also stated that they would help him attain staffing and assistance with medical records. It was reported that in the last few months, Dr. Chawla had learned about some of the financial parts of running the clinic. In mentioning this, Dr. Chawla reported that it took about \$70.00 - \$75.00 to break even to see a patient, which did not include physician salary. Medicare usually paid a \$100.00-\$120.00 as reported by Dr. Chawla. Washington Regional Medical Hospital would reportedly pay for staff salaries.

Interim County Manager Eisner stated the proposed lease contract for Williamston Medical, P.L.L.C was reviewed by Ascendiant Consultant Dawn Carter and County Healthcare Attorney Tom Stukes. It was stated that Dr. Chawla could have his own attorneys to review the proposed lease. There was a market analysis done to calculate the base rent. The proposed rental amount would be around \$6,090.00/month, but staff proposed a waiver of this amount for the first 12 months of operations with a three-year term. A memorandum of lease would need to be conducted since the clinic at 104 Medical Drive in Williamston was also connected to the parcel of the actual hospital.

Commissioner Smith asked Dr. Chawla to be realistic with himself in deciding when to begin operations at the proposed clinic, due to the Board deciding not to begin the lease until operations could begin. Dr. Chawla stated that the clinic should be ready by the last week of January 2024. Commissioner Biggs asked if Dr. Chawla could open operations the first week of February 2024. Dr. Chawla stated that the clinic was ready besides the computer system.

Tammy Perry, Manager of Williamston Clinic, P.L.L.C, stated that she was employed through Affinity Health Partners to help the clinic open. Ms. Perry mentioned speaking with Mr. Frank Avignone, Affinity Health Partners CEO, in regards to lab services. It was reported that Lab Corp would be meeting with Ms. Perry in regards to them conducting lab services for the clinic. If Lab Corp agreed to provide services, the clinic staff would draw the labs and Lab Corp would pick them up. The clinic would not be charged, but the patients would be charged for the lab services. Electronic Medical Records were supposedly going to be implemented in the next week and if they weren't, the clinic would have to make do. Dr. Chawla was reportedly working another job; therefore clinics would be scheduled every other week. Ms. Perry had hopes to convert the clinic to the Rural Health Clinic as an application was submitted. An inspection would be needed before being registered as a Rural Health Clinic. Overall, there may be a few months before the clinic could be designated as a Rural Health Clinic.

Dr. Chawla requested stated many issues with the building, as the previous hospital operators, Qourum, did not make necessary repairs. The flooring of the proposed clinic had a soft spot that has been marked, the parking lot had large holes in it, roofing issues, and all safety aspects needed to be looked at.

Commissioner Smith asked if Dr., Chawla had any estimates. Dr. Chawla did not have the estimate. Commissioner Smith asked if Dr. Chawla was asking the Board to bring the proposed clinic up to code.

Commissioner Gurganus suggested that if the Board was willing to allow Dr. Chawla to rent the building for the first 12 months of operation at no cost, the County should also provide repairs. Commissioner Gurganus felt that the County could afford to repair the clinic.

Commissioner Smith asked to make a motion on the lease before voting on repairs.

Commissioner Smith made a Motion to Approve the lease between Martin County and the Williamston Clinic, P.L.L.C. starting January 10, 2024, with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus. Motion was Carried by raise of hands (5-0).

Commissioner Gurganus made a Motion for County Attorney/Interim County Manager Eisner to contact Justin Harrison with the County Maintenance Department, Justin Harrison complete a thorough assessment at the clinic, Justin Harrison return the assessment to County Attorney/Interim County Manager Eisner to move forward in fixing the assessed repairs . Motion was Seconded by Commissioner Ayers.

Discussion: Commissioner Smith stated that the Board had no idea what the schedule of the maintenance department was and the Board may have to consider contracting the renovation of the clinic out. Commissioner Smith stated after the assessment the Interim County Manager needed to make the decision if the project would need to be contracted out.

County Attorney/Interim County Manager stated that the matter was moving fast in regards to voting and decisions that were made thus far. Reportedly, County Attorney/Interim County Manager Eisner stated that the lease was originally planned to begin on January 16, 2024 to give time (a week) for an assessment. County Attorney/Interim County Manager Eisner reported that he and Justin Harrison of the Maintenance Department discussed this plan and previously conducted a ride around the hospital.

Commissioner Gurganus stated that Justin Harrison knew what to do and what needed to be done. Commissioner Gurganus asked that if the renovations needed to be contracted out, then to do so, as long as the building was fixed.

The Motion was Carried by vote of raised hands (5-0).

North Carolina Association of County Commissioner's (NCACC) Meeting with District #2 County Boards

Each spring, the NCACC hosts a series of District Meetings throughout the state. These meetings will focus on elected-to-elected networking with members of the North Carolina General Assembly. Commissioners and legislators in their districts are invited to join NCACC for a networking reception, lunch, and an update on the Association. District Meetings will be held in nine regions across the state. Martin County is in District #2 along with Hertford, Beaufort, Washington, Bertie, and Pitt Counties.

This year, NCACC Abbey Thayer made contact with the District Director Dempsey Bond Jr. stating that the District Director's of each District would host the meeting. This included the logistics of the venue, catering, and invitations sent to the County Boards within District #2.

NCACC Abbey Thayer stated that the NCACC would provide up to \$500.00 for the catering services. Contact was made to the Hitchn' Post, whom has agreed to provide catering services at \$404.62. The NC Telecenter was booked as the venue wherein the NCACC will hold their meeting. The meeting will be at no cost to Martin County. NCACC will hold their meeting on January 23, 2024 in the NC Telecenter from 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m.

No vote required, informational purposes only.

Chairman Bond Jr. and Commissioner Smith made comments regarding the meeting and that representatives of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners would give Legislative updates.

Sheriff's Office Personnel

County Attorney /Interim County Manager Eisner reported that in August 2023, the Sheriff came before the Board to discuss raises for the Deputy's staff in the amount of \$4,000.00 per person. The Board approved the salary raises of \$4,000.00, per person. At the time, Sheriff Tim Manning was not included in that raise request. Sheriff Tim Manning submitted a request for an increase in his salary of \$4,000.00 to match the increase that was approved last year for the Deputies.

Commissioner Gurganus made the Motion to Approve of the \$4,000.00 salary increase for Sheriff Tim Manning, with a Second by Commissioner Ayers. Motion was Carried by raise of hands (5-0)

Amendment to Auditor Contract with Carr, Riggs, and Ingram, P.L.L.C

County Attorney/Interim County Manager Eisner stated that the amendment was a technical correction to a contract for the Auditor of the County, Carr, Riggs, and Ingram P.L.L.C. The auditors were reportedly working on the annual audit. County Attorney/Interim County Manager Eisner stated that the contract with the auditor company was approved to end on June 30th. It was also reported that if the audit was not submitted to the Local Government Commission (LGC) by December 1 of the Fiscal Year (FY). If the audit was not submitted on time, an amendment of the auditor contract needed to be approved and sent to the LGC.

It was reported that in this instance, there was a delay in receiving the actuary study. Finance Officer Cindy Ange was asked to discuss the matter further if needed. The auditors were reportedly going to complete the audit by the end of this month. There were no changes to cost or fees in the auditor's contract. The contract was submitted for review in the agenda packets.

Commissioner Ayers to Approve of the Amended Contract Between Martin County and Auditors Carr Riggs, and Ingram, P.L.L.C., with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus. There was discussion called.

Commissioner Smith asked Finance Officer Cindy Ange if a letter was sent to the LGC explaining what the situation was. Finance Officer Ange stated that the letter of explanation was not required

by the LGC anymore; until after the audit is submitted. Finance Officer Ange stated that there was a reasoning stated on the amended contract that would be sent to the LGC as well.

Commissioner Ayers to Approve of the Amended Contract Between Martin County and Auditors Carr Riggs, and Ingram, P.L.L.C., with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus. The Motion was Carried by vote of raised hands (5-0).

Martin County 250th Anniversary Celebration

County Attorney/Interim County Manager stated that the Martin County was established March 14, 1774 and an appropriate celebration was being planned. The recommendation is that the County provide some funding to assist with the celebration. Tourism Development Authority (TDA) Director Chase Conner stated that he had the opportunity to participate in a planning committee last year that included towns, organizations, and other stakeholders. There were reportedly 60 individuals that attended the first meeting. Partnerships with UPLIFT and other state programs were involved with the planning process as well. A budget was set at the last meeting and the estimate for the festivities totaled around \$40,000.00. TDA Director Conner asked the Board for funding for the 250th Anniversary Celebration with a minimum of \$10,000.00

Commissioner Smith expressed that he felt the Board should approve more than \$10,000.00, as this was the 250th Anniversary of Martin County. Commissioner Smith stated that Pitt County was also planning their 250th Anniversary before asking to double the requested funding.

Commissioner Smith made the Motion to double the amount of requested funding (Total \$20,000) from the County to go towards the 250th Anniversary Celebration, with a Second by Commissioner Biggs. Motion was Carried by raise of hands (5-0).

Viable Utility Grant - Asset Inventory Assessment Award letter and Resolution by Governing Body of Recipient Accepting the State Reserve Grant

County Attorney/Interim County Manager stated that Martin County was approved for an Asset Inventory Assessment Grant (AIA) from the Water Infrastructure Funds from the State Reserve in amount of \$150,000.00. There was a resolution that needed to be adopted to receive the funding.

Chairman Bond Jr. asked if the funding was in regards to a merger and assessment and County Attorney/Interim County Manager Eisner agreed.

Commissioner Smith stated when looking at the grant amounting in \$150,000.00, the County was fortunate to only have to match \$2,250.00. Commissioner Smith reported that he and others went to Raleigh about 2 years ago and were informed about the funding in a discussion. Commissioner Smith added that the group was able to designate the towns in Martin County as distressed, with exceptions of Jamesville and Bear Grass. In working with the Division of Water Infrastructure, Commissioner Smith stated that the County received numerous grants as well as the town within the County. Some mayors were in attendance and were asked how much funding they received. Mayor Tina Brown of Robersonville stated that Robersonville received \$50,000.00 and Mayor Charlotte Griffin of Bear Grass stated that Bear Grass received. Jamesville reportedly received \$100,000.00 in the first round of funding. Lastly, Commissioner Smith stated that the funding did not just appear, but it came from working with different divisions in Raleigh.

Mayor of Bear Grass, Charlotte Griffin made a comment that the Asset Inventory Assessment (AIA) funding gave towns the ability to afford assessments on water pipes whether sewer or water. Commissioner Smith asked Mayor of Bear Grass Griffin how much Jamesville received in total and \$14 million was reported. Commissioner Smith reiterated that funding did not just appear and spoke about Sheriff Tim Manning attaining grants from conferences that he attended.

RESOLUTION BY GOVERNING BODY OF RECIPIENT

WHEREAS, the North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 159G has created Viable Utility grants to assist eligible units of government with meeting their water infrastructure needs, and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality has offered a State Reserve Grant in the amount of \$150,000.00 to perform an Asset Inventory and Assessment study detailed in the submitted application, and

WHEREAS, the Martin County Board of Commissioners intends to perform said project in accordance with the agreed scope of work,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF MARTIN COUNTY:

That Martin County Board of Commissioners does hereby accept the State Reserve Grant offer of \$150,000.00.

That the Martin County Board of Commissioners does hereby give assurances to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality that any Conditions or Assurances contained in the Award Offer will be adhered to.

That Dempsey Bond Jr., Martin County Chairman, and successors so titled, is hereby authorized and directed to finish such information as the appropriate State agency may request in connection with this project; to make the assurances as contained above; and to execute such other documents as may be required by the Division of Water Infrastructure.

Adopted this the 10th day of January, 2024 at Williamston, Martin County, North Carolina.

Dempsey Bond Jr.,
Chairman, Martin County Board of Commissioners

Date

Julia S. Rease
Clerk to the Board

Commissioner Gurganus made the Motion to Adopt the Resolution By Governing Body of Recipient to Receive the AIA funding of \$150,000.00, with a Second by Commissioner Smith. Motion was Carried by raise of hands (5-0).

Tax Assessor Immaterial Regularity Parcels (2)

Parcel: 0506025

Tax Assessor Melissa Phillips stated that a visit was conducted on April 3, 2023 in response to the property owner submitting an informal appeal regarding the real estate value. Tax Assessor Phillips reported that the property owners appeal mentioned the condition of the property. Since the Board of Equalization and Review had not convened for the year, the Tax Assessor's Office were reportedly within their statutory right to make an adjustment. Due to the Condition of the property, there was a change of value. A letter was dated on April 3, 2023 and signed by Hilton Edmondson stating that the tax value for tax year 2024 had been reappraised at \$2,201,010.00 on the property. The letter was accompanied by the property owners appeal information.

Tax Assessor Phillips reported the property owner conducted an office visit on December 8, 2023 regarding the reevaluation for 2023. The value change should have been effective for 2023 instead of 2024. Tax Assessor Phillips noted that the 2022 value of the property was \$4,464,480.00. This appeal decreased the value of the property by \$2,263,470.00. Per North Carolina General Statute 105-394(5) Immaterial regularities, allowed Tax Assessors to correct any defect in the description upon any abstract, tax receipt, tax record, notice, advertisement, or other document for real or personal property.

Tax Assessor Phillips asked the Board to approve the correction in the letter mailed to the property owner dated April 3, 2023, to correct the tax year to 2023 from 2024, per N.C.G.S. 105-394(3). This would allow the Tax Assessor's Office to adjust the property value to \$2,201,010.00.

Vice Chair Biggs asked if the property owner was in attendance and if it was possible to table the matter until next month, since it was a large amount. Tax Assessor Phillips reported that she did not see the property owner. Tax Assessor Phillips stated the Tax Assessor's Office made an error, presented it to the Board to correct the error, and the property owner did not have anything to challenge or defend.

Commissioner Ayers made the Motion to Allow the Tax Assessor to adjust the clerical error as described.

Vice Chair Biggs made a Motion to Table this matter until next month.

Commissioner Ayers asked for clarification on Vice Chair Biggs' motion. Commissioner Ayers stated that Tax Assessor Phillips admitted that there was a clerical error and was trying to correct it. Vice Chair Biggs agreed to move forward with the correction of the error and rescinded her motion.

Commissioner Ayers made the Motion to Allow the Tax Assessor to adjust the clerical error as described, with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus. Motion was Carried by raise of hands (5-0).

Parcel: 0506025

Tax Assessor Phillips reported that on January 24, 2023 Tax Assessor Allen Hildebrandt made a value change due to an informal appeal on the measurement on a new construction building. Since the Board of Equalization and Review had not convened for the year, the Tax Assessor's Office had the statutory right to make an adjustment. A letter dated January 24, 2023 and signed by Tax Assessor Hildebrandt stated the tax value for tax year 2023 had been appraised at \$1,069,020.00 on the parcel. It reportedly provided the appeal information as well. The owner of the property conducted an office visit at the Tax Assessors' Office on December 21, 2023 regarding the billed valuation for 2023, as the value change should have been effective for 2023. Tax Assessor Phillips reported that this appeal would cause a \$2,760.00 decrease in the property value.

According to North Carolina General Statute 105-139(5) Immaterial Regularities; Tax Assessor's had the right to correct any defect in the description upon any abstract, tax receipt, tax record, notice advertisement, or other document of real or personal property. Tax Assessor Phillips asked the Board for approval to correct the property value to the appraised value stated in the letter, dated January 24, 2023, to \$1,069,020 and the tax bill for 2023.

Commissioner Smith made the Motion to Approve to corrections as stated, with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus. Motion was Carried by raise of hands (5-0).

Avineon, Inc. Contract for Tax Assessor's Office

Tax Assessor Phillips reported that Avineon, Inc. was the GIS support contractor for the Tax Assessor's Office. This past year, with the help of the IT Department, the Tax Assessor's Office was able to negotiate the contract price for services that the contractor provided for the County over several years. The portion of the contract negotiated was for GIS mapping services such as splits, merges, and any type of changes to the actual property map itself. Tax Assessor Phillips stated that the contract originally covered 100 parcels, but there was a large subdivision that was built recently. Tax Assessor Phillips asked that the Board approve an adjustment to the contract in the amount of \$2,050.00 to add an additional 100 parcels, totaling in 200 parcels. No budget amendments were reportedly needed since the funding for the contract was already in the Tax Assessor's budget.

Commissioner Smith made a Motion to Approve the Amendment to the Avineon, Inc. Contract, with a Second by Commissioner Gurganus. Motion was Carried unanimously by raise of hands (5-0).

Budget Amendments #33-35

Budget Amendment #33

Finance Officer Cindy Ange stated that the Martin County ABC Board awarded an additional \$500 to the Sheriff's Office for the DARE program over the County's original budget. Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) is an education program that seeks to prevent the use of controlled drugs, membership in gangs, and violent behavior. Students who enter the program sign a pledge not to use drugs or join gangs and are instructed by a Martin County deputy using an interactive

in-school curriculum which lasts 12 weeks. In addition, a deputy was in an accident with a deer on Bear Grass Road. The deer damaged the left corner and the front bumper of the 2022 Dodge Ram truck. The County has received an insurance check for \$2,339 to assist in repairing the truck.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-33

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		
Sheriff	\$ 2,839	

This will result in an increase of \$2,839 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	\$ 500
Miscellaneous	\$ 2,339

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 10th day of January 2024. Motion was Carried by raise of hands (5-0).

Budget Amendment #34

Finance Officer Ange Martin County was chartered on March 14, 1774, and is named for the last Royal Governor of North Carolina, Josiah Martin. This year marks the 250 anniversary of Martin County, and celebrations are being planned. This budget amendment from fund balance will fund some of those activities.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-34

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
Cultural and Recreational		
Other Recreation	\$ 20,000	

This will result in an increase of \$10,000 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

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 Smith and Seconded by Commissioner Gurganus to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 10th day of January 2024. Motion was Carried unanimously by raise of hands (5-0).

Budget Amendment #35

Finance Officer Ange reported that a 2020 Ford F150 truck assigned to the water department was in an accident in September. The estimate to have the truck repaired was \$7,888. The County received an insurance claim check in the amount of \$6,785. This budget amendment appropriates these funds to repair the vehicle.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-35

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 Water District #1, the expenditures are to be changed as follows.

	Increase	Decrease
Water Administration	\$ 6,785	

This will result in an increase of \$6,785 in the expenditures of Water District #1. To provide an increase in the revenues for the above, the following revenues will be changed.

Insurance Proceeds	\$ 6,785
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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 Smith and Seconded by Commissioner Gurganus to adopt the above budget ordinance amendment this 10th day of January 2024. Motion was Carried unanimously by raise of hands (5-0).

Public Address to the Board

Mr. Paul Roberson made a 15-minute presentation to the Board granted by County Attorney Eisner. The 15-minute presentation discussed expenses, wherein Mr. Gardner requested PNC banking statements for Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr., Vice Chair Emily Biggs, Commissioner Ronnie Smith, and former County Manager U. James Bennett. Mr. Roberson stated his concerns with a PowerPoint presentation that displayed the expenses paid for at a National Association of Counties Conference (NACo) in 2021.

“Greetings citizens and Commissioners. I want to discuss with you tonight the travel and entertainment expenses of our Martin County Commissioners. The following presentation will highlight some of the more important expenses from June 21 to June 22. This in no way covers all expenses. I received another year's worth this week and I and others are still pouring over these, and we'll be discussing those at a later date.

Let me start by saying that Commissioner Ayers and Gurganus did not participate in any of these trips or expenses that we are discussing. I appreciate them being good stewards of the citizens monies. As you will see, the same cannot be said for Commissioner Smith, Bonds, Biggs and former Manager Bennett, and we'll be delving into that in just a minute.

I want to read something to you tonight from the travel policy of Martin County. An employee or board member traveling on official business is expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business and expending their personal funds. Excess costs, circuitous routes, luxury accommodations, and services unnecessary unjustified in the performance of official business are not acceptable under this standard and it goes on, but I will stop there. There's a slide show, you're not going to be able to read it, and I apologize, but this information will be posted later for the citizens to see it.

On March 19 2021, the NACo Board of Directors approved plans to have a, NACo is the National Association of Counties; they had an annual conference in Prince George County, Maryland. Commissioners Biggs, Bonds, and Smith attended the National Association of Counties conference in Prince George Maryland. The dates of the conference were July 9th to 12th. Travel for this trip was \$6,307.66. This was during the height of Covid and was offered as a hundred percent online virtual event. The Commissioners and Bennett could have stayed home and saved travel and hotel expenses, and food expenses, but when the taxpayers are paying, let's go it's free. We all know Commissioner Biggs is concerned about Covid as she wears a mask at the meeting and which is a great thing, but it's a wonder if she went at all. Slide two, The conference was from July 9th - 12th as I said, so I'm unsure why there are multiple hotel charges on, Commissioner, I mean, excuse me, on County Manager Bennett credit card and a transaction date of 07/14/15. I will be asking Finance for clarification of these details. Slide three, shows the typical dining habits of Bennett and Biggs. See the slide, a \$35 to \$50 meal. They love seafood. We see the Walrus. At the Walrus, the citizens paid for Bennett and Biggs to enjoy a \$29 seafood kettle and walrus wings, whatever that is. One of the issues I have is that the expenses, is in fact, in some cases, they have no receipt from the restaurant showing what was the items that were purchased. So it gives the opportunity for alcohol to be purchased. I'm not saying they did that, I'm saying I can't tell from the records whether they did or not. Slide four, is Bennett's hotel bill, which we can see was \$209 a night. Mr. Bennett bought gas at Wawa in Hopewell, Virginia on slide five for \$30.06. He lost the receipt. In my experience at looking at these documents, over 500 pages of them, there were many lost receipts. On slide six, this shows Commissioner Biggs's expenses for the Commission, \$1,233 hotel bill receipts for another Chesapeake kettle. A \$26 receipt for sushi and sky and sea delight costing \$34. That was a total expenditure, \$1,338.00.

Slide seven, shows Commissioner Biggs' deluxe guest hotel room. A King's Deluxe. Slide eight; This is quite interesting, there's several expenses for dining locally. Bennett apparently liked to meet and pay for meals on the citizens' dime, rather than meet at the office provided to him by the County of Martin. There is also a trip to Wilmington. It is unknown what this trip is for and why he stayed in two different Hampton Inns. One charge was \$179, and on 08/12/21, a different arrival date in a charge of \$539.01 for an arrival date of 08/12. So, they changed hotels with no explanation

of you know any reason. I will be clarifying with Finance what that visit was about, as no documentation was provided as to what the nature of the business was. On slide nine, Biggs had an arrival date of 08/11, and a charge of \$185, and another charge of \$539, just like Mr. Bennett. Interestingly enough, check in by Biggs and Bennett on the 11th, a Wednesday, and they checked out on Sunday the 15th. What kind of business were they doing on the weekend? I will be questioning the finance department for further explanation of these expenses, and on Sunday after checkout, Biggs enjoyed a \$51.75 meal at Elijah's restaurant on the water in Wilmington. Don't know if you've ever been there, it's a wonderful place. She enjoyed more oysters and more seafood. Interestingly enough, Commissioner Bond only went to Wilmington and stayed on 08/14. So this brings into question of validity of Bennett and Biggs extended stay on a citizen's dime, so I will be looking further into that. Slide ten, shows what I just discussed, Dempsey's one night stay in Wilmington, as opposed to Bennett and Biggs' extended stay. Slide eleven, typical of Mr. Bennett being big spender and local entertaining, his \$675 membership to the National Association of Counties in 12/21, so to be a member of the National Association Counties and their organizations, is anywhere, just to be a member and go to the convention for each one, is somewhere between \$ 450.00 and \$675.00 for each person. That's before you do hotel, travel, anything, so approximately \$2,700 and of course, Mr. Bennett didn't want to miss the next trip, so he had to pay that. We had to pay that, so the total expenses were \$1,087 and slide twelve is his NACo fee that what we just talked about \$675. Slide 13, Biggs and Smith, NACo charges on their credit cards for \$675 each. Got to pay so they can go to the convention in a couple months, so it's costing these four \$2,700 just to attend the convention. That doesn't include travel, dining or hotel accommodations just event attendance. Why didn't they do like a lot of county counties do, and send one chosen delegate to report back to the board. Send them to the event; report back to the board and the citizens the content of the meeting. This was nothing more than an opportunity for them to see and be seen, and for Smith to further his political career at the taxpayers' expense and slide 14 is the same for Mr. Bond, \$675 to NACo. Mr. Bennett, on slide 15, I have no idea what these expenses are, some hotel booking service of \$14.99, North Carolina Rural Center, another thing that I'll be asking for clarification of.

Slide 16, This is January 2nd, of January 22, excuse me, I call this when Mr. Smith goes to Washington, I apologize for my cynicism, but I have stared and poured over these wasteful expenses for more hours than I care to count. I am angry. He stayed at the Hilton on Capitol Hill and the citizens of Martin County paid for him to valet park three times at \$55 a time. Pardon my language, but park your own damn car. Furthermore, the receipt has Ronnie Smith at 323 West Jones Street in Raleigh, which is the address of the North Carolina Association of Counties. He was a member and was either the board at this time, was either on the board or President of North Carolina Association Accounts. So why was this bill not sent to the NCAC and why was it billed to Martin County? One thing of interest to note is that, unlike Bond, Bennett, Biggs and Smith's credit card statement doesn't have Martin County on the top of the statement up there, you can see in a corner. Other ones have Martin County below their name. Mr. Smith's credit card does not. So, does that give him the opportunity, and again, I'm not saying he did, to potentially double dip and bill both entities. I don't know. Slide 17, February of 22, we should call this when Mr. Smith goes back to Washington to the NACo conference. Five nights and a hotel bill of \$1,542. 62. He enjoyed a \$29 steak at Denny's. Who knew Denny's even had steak?

Slide 18, Mr. Smith hotel bill again, \$1,542.63 and the next page is Mr. Bond's hotel expenses for the Hilton which he stayed at and some food expenses there, and his \$1,542 hotel bill, and the next page is his hotel just his reservation page. Slide 21, Bennett's expenses for 02/22. A stay in Winston Salem at \$539.01 at the Marriott. Small Batch Brewery receipt, the restaurant that he

dined at. No receipt showing what that expense was for, so it could have possibly involved alcohol as well. Peterson Brothers Tires, there is a couple of these expenses in this year. Correct me if I'm wrong Commissioners, but the County has a motor fleet management contract with the local car dealership. So why would the county manager be allowed to take his vehicle to a private entity to work on it, and then expense the county for it. There's also a Hilton Hotel convention bill, \$1,542.62 for him. Okay, next page shows that hotel reservation.

All right, the next page, next slide 23, showed Mr. Bennett eating a \$40 breakfast. It's hard to eat a \$40 breakfast, but anyway um and it shows that Peterson Brothers Tire receipt. I apologize the receipt was given to me. It was handwritten very light, but the amount on it is \$90 for Peterson's Tire. Slide 24, this is a good one; it shows Biggs' dining expenses, but oddly enough, it does not show a hotel bill at the convention. The transaction takes place has her at the place of the hotel between 02/12 and 02/16. Other Commissioner's and Bennett keep in mind, had a hotel room. Did she stay in the car? Did she stay with Bennett? I don't know, if so that's great. At least she saved the taxpayers some money. The next page, slide 25, James Bennett's Credit card for 03/22, another \$530 NACo charge, \$550.40 hotel bill in Raleigh. Another undocumented trip without explanation. I will see clarification of that as well

Slide 26, this was brought up at the last meeting in my absence. The Oyster Bar receipt, attending was Biggs, Elaine Stevens, I do not know who that is and her husband, Kitty Barnes, a Catawba County Commissioner, and NACO member, and her husband, Donna, who we have found out this evening, was Donna Zube, the Human Resources Manager. There were multiple alcohol charges, which is a hundred percent against the County's policy. The county does not pay for alcohol, yet it paid this receipt. Also, somebody ordered 2 lbs. of crab legs that were \$84. Is that being good stewards of citizens' money? No expense was spared, the citizens footed the bill. The total expense was \$326.53. Ok Slide 27, Embassy Suites Charlotte Golf and Spa Resort. \$425 hotel stay for Bennett. Another undefined trip that I need clarify.

Slide 28, I want think Miss Julia Rease, the County Clerk for being a good steward of the citizens money. She accidentally expensed a \$1.61 cereal bar to her hotel room. Instead, and so concerned about, she wrote a paragraph on the receipt and reimbursed the County, not \$1.06, but \$2, because she was so concerned about it, so she's been a good steward of the citizens money.

Slide 29, we'll call this when Mr. and Mrs. Smith goes to Denver. As was brought up last time, Mr. Smith bought his wife a plane ticket to accompany him to Denver on the County credit card. He reimbursed the county for the ticket more than two months later on 08/24. I have checked with multiple state agencies and law enforcement this was a criminal act and with misuse of taxpayer funds and unauthorized government loan. The fact that it was paid back is irrelevant in the eyes of law enforcement. That ticket was \$916.20 and also the Commissioners flew out of Greenville, which, if anybody's ever flown out of Greenville knows, it's a great deal more expensive than flying out of international airport like Raleigh. We'll move right on to slide 31, skip that one. Slide 31 is where Mr. Smith check was written back to the county on August 24. The date is right up there, 916.20 was not reimbursed. The ticket was purchased on June 17, the data travel was July 20, reimbursement was August 24. County has a policy that that reimbursements are to be made within 30 days.

Slide 32, this was just Emily Biggs ticket; \$916.20 from Greenville and she had some food purchases up there that month and it was all, yes it was that, and also Mr. Bennett's plane ticket and food expense, excuse me the food expenses were Bennett's, not Biggs. Okay, on slide 33 and

we're nearing the end here, Bennett's mileage reimbursement. He took a trip to Charlotte, but Bennett had a County vehicle as County Manager. To my knowledge, it is stamped and approved by finance, a reimbursement of \$341.61 for mileage, but yet the County policy says if the vehicle is available they should take a County car and the next the last page is just his receipt that he turned in for that and then I just want to make some general, a couple general comments in closing.

So what's to take away from all this information? Commissioner Biggs, Smith, Bond, and Manager Bennett recklessly spent approximately \$25, 000 of money belonging to the citizens of Martin County on travel, hotel and food for fiscal year 21-22. Shame on you three. How can you sit so boldly and arrogantly before the people?

You work for us and all three of you need to be fired at the ballot box. Your sense of entitlement is appalling. Martin County, a poor tier one County, where some citizens do not make \$25, 000 in a year. What did the citizens of Martin County have to show for their \$25,000 investment? Absolutely nothing. You were elected to represent the people and be good stewards of the citizens resources. Instead, we have financed a lavish lifestyle for you three these events were pleasure trips for Biggs, Bennett, Smith, and Bond. You brought back \$0 to help Martin County Commissioner Smith broke the law by using the County credit card for his wife's plane ticket to Denver and by using the County as his personal lender, he also broke the law by charging the \$920 hotel bill to the County that was billed to the NCACC. Sir, the authorities on to you and you're in trouble. In next year's fiscal report, 2023 will be looked at. There's a trip to Denver for the three Commissioners and Mr. Bennett that costs the taxpayers \$11,000. The 2024 NACo Legislative Conference this year is in Washington DC on February 10th - 13th, 2024. We, the citizens, demands you do not attend this convention. Citizens please contact the County Commissioners and stand and demand they not go; I will post their contact information on Facebook later. I call for an immediate ban on all travel by County employees and Commissioners until such time as the County Manager and Board of Commissioners can revise the archaic travel policy and reduce it to a clear, concise policy manual that is in line with North Carolina state standards. I call for the maximum, a maximum allowable hotel per diem, a maximum of \$20 a meal for up to three meals per day. I call for a hotel stay to only be allowed the night before the beginning of a convention through the last day of the convention, meaning that on the last day of the convention, you're expected to stay at your own expense, or return home that evening. Any entertaining at the local level must be Board approved at the prior months meeting. Furthermore, the Finance Director should present at the regular monthly meeting a report and open session on expenses of the Manager's Office and the Board. That's all I have to say Thank you."

"Commissioner Smith asked Mr. Roberson to return to the podium. Chairman Bond Jr. stated that Mr. Roberson made a presentation asked if the Board had any questions and or comments.

Commissioner Gurganus commented that Mr. Roberson spend a lot of effort in digging through the documents. Commissioner Gurganus stated that he did not know about the expenses.

Mr. Roberson stated that he was upset that the State had not come down to Martin County yet, but he was trying everything he could do to rectify this because it was their job, they were paid elected officials and paid state employees to see stuff like this and he was not a forensic accountant and shouldn't have had to do this level of stuff to uncover what was going on and it was wrong.

Commissioner Smith stated that he did research on requirements in regards to becoming a broker since Mr. Roberson was a broker himself, then related this information to County Commissioner trainings, classes, course, etc.

There was an outcry from the audience and Chairman Bond Jr. called for order and hit his gavel.

Commissioner Smith reported that the County Commissioners or elected officials were required to meet an age requirement, pay a fee, live in the district, and a few other things. Commissioner Smith stated that once elected, they were own their own. Commissioner Smith stated that in Mr. Roberson's and others professions, they were required to enter with a certain amount of education or had to meet certain requirements. Commissioner Smith stated in the 2021-2022 expenses that Mr. Roberson reported on, Mr. Roberson stated that he was going to clarify the expenses with the Finance Officer. Commissioner Smith stated that Mr. Roberson should have clarified before Mr. Roberson got up and gave out numbers. Mr. Roberson agreed and stated that the report wasn't Commissioner Smith expenses. Commissioner Smith reported that if Mr. Roberson were to go back to 2017-2018, Commissioner Smith used the County credit card, but the State association reimbursed every dime. Mr. Roberson stated that he was not provided the receipt for this; it was not his fault, and asked for the receipts. Commissioner Smith stated Mr. Roberson got up in front of people to accuse and Mr. Roberson stated that he did not accuse as he stated that "he didn't know", which was not accusatory. Mr. Roberson stated that if Commissioner Smith could clarified to do so. Commissioner Smith reiterated that Mr. Roberson should have clarified with the Finance Officer. The discussion continued between Mr. Roberson and Commissioner Smith regarding state agencies investigating and auditing the County such as the Local Government Commission, State Bureau of Investigations, the County's independent auditor, and accusations being made.

Chairman Bond Jr., called for order, continued to hit his gavel, and asked that the conversation end to move forward to public comments. Mr. Roberson apologized before taking his seat.

Public Comments

County Attorney Eisner read the public comment Board procedures.

Ms. Martha MacDonald - 20770 US HWY 64, Williamston, NC 27892

Mrs. MacDonald stated that yesterday was National Law Enforcement Day. Mrs. MacDonald first wanted to acknowledge Sheriff Manning and his Deputies and the LEO's in the County. Mrs. MacDonald stated that their selfless service was much appreciation. Mrs. MacDonald continued to state, "From the people that protect and serve, to the three people who are totally self-serving, Commissioners look at this number. \$1,128.00, that's the average social security for five seniors in this County. That's all that they have to live on every month, plus saving money to pay their County taxes. Look at this number, \$11,035.46, that's the amount of money, you three plus James Bennett, spent in Denver, Colorado. You spent in four days, what those five seniors would live on for nine in a half month. Think about that. Denver trip: luxury hotel rooms, extravagant meals, Ronnie's bill for eating \$102.62, three hotel rooms the night before the convention. The lowest price was \$578.30, that's three rooms' folks. Three rooms were charged on Bennett's credit card and the registration stated Bennett, Bond, and Biggs. Mr. Smith I'd like to thank you, obviously you and your wife slept in the tree, because there's not a hotel room for you." Mrs. MacDonald suggested that since Commissioner Smith didn't have a room, Commissioner Biggs registered and Commissioner Smith stayed in Commissioner Biggs room, and Commissioner Biggs stayed with Mr. Bennett. Mrs. MacDonald continued to state, "Inappropriate at best as she is a Commissioner and always voting YAY for any decisions that concern Mr. Bennett or his agenda. Morally, she is

dealing with her own moral compass, but maybe the Board of Education needs to examine their Code of Conduct. I put forth the motion that no more trips be taken by the Commissioners, until policies can be put into place, furthermore, only one Commissioner should attend any workshop or convention, and then it should be reported on at the next open meeting, and let everyone hear what they did. I sent Eisner and asked for if there were any other trips being planned, haven't gotten anything back from him". Mrs. MacDonald then asked Finance why was food brought in from Mr. Bennett for the Finance Office as an award for doing a good job on the previous year's audit, as they were doing their job. Mrs. MacDonald asked if there were any other departments given presents of food for doing their job. Mrs. MacDonald asked if it was doing a good job to allow Mr. Bennett and Commissioner Smith to use County credit cards as their own personal finance-lending tree. Mrs. MacDonald stated that it was becoming an accepted practice. Mrs. MacDonald asked if it was a good job to allow alcohol to be purchased and paid for by the County credit card. Mrs. MacDonald asked if it was a good job to just look the other way. Mrs. MacDonald stated that perhaps these things were just an oversight..."

Chairman Bond Jr. asked Mrs. MacDonald to return to her seat multiple times as the three-minute time limit for public comments as stated in the Public Comment procedures, had concluded. Mrs. MacDonald continued to speak and Chairman Bond Jr. continued to ask Mrs. MacDonald to return to her seat. Mrs. MacDonald continued to speak until she got to her seat.

Mr. Robert Stalls – 1125 Bobby Roberson Road, Williamston, NC 27892

Mr. Stalls provided a typed document of his public comment and supporting documents that can be located with the original agenda packet filed with the Clerk. Mr. Stall's public comment is as stated (2pages):

Jan 10, 2024 Public Comment

Robert Mack Stalls, 1125 Bobby Roberson Rd, Farm Life Comity

Let's say, for example, that I saw a commissioner, maybe Mr. Bond, at a community garden, with a hoe, working hard to benefit his community. I then come before this Board and say - "Commissioner Bond, thank you for the positive example you were setting for our citizens!" - I cannot do that - without violating your rules for public comment

The public comment period was mandated in 2005 with provisions for local rules affecting "time, place, and manner" - while not clashing with the First Amendment. Since then, some rules have been questioned for going beyond those restrictions, compelling attorneys with the UNC School of Government to publish numerous articles for advice and guidance.

Comparing this county's rules with them, I find at least four articles by two attorneys that may call our rules #5 and #9 into question.

I have spoken briefly with Mr. Eisner about this, emailed him some relevant information, and been invited to meet with him at a convenient time. I am leaving a copy of this material with the clerk so you may have copies, and I'd be eager to discuss this with any of you.

My hope is that you'll see this as an opportunity to prevent potential controversy, while standing in support of the laws and rights you've sworn to uphold.

Mr. Stalls thanked the Board before returning to his seat.

Mrs. Sara Stalls – 1125 Bobby Roberson Road, Williamston, NC 27892

Mrs. Stalls stated, "On a previous job, that was funded by tax payer monies, I had a supervisor who encouraged me to take part in professional development opportunities. However, before he would sign off on my travel and expense report, I had to bring him a program or agenda from the event. I had to share with him what I learned and how I planned to put that knowledge to use for

the benefit of the district that I was working for at the time and there was follow up. There was praise if he saw that I was putting to work of the things we discussed and there were questions if I did not. Initially I thought he was being a micro manager. Now I get it, he was being a good steward of funds.

Ms. Verna Perry – 2161 Jones Road, Williamston NC

Ms. Perry stated, “I want to thank Tim and his staff for the hard work you all do for the citizens of Martin County. What can I say about you all? [Commissioners]. Nope. I want you all to know that I did some footwork. I talked to the administrator at Bertie hospital. I’m going from August 3rd, when we closed down, to January. From August, they have seen 294 patients of Martin County. 99 of them was by ambulance. September, they saw 322 Martin County patients, 130 by ambulance. October - 339 patients of Martin County, 118 by ambulance. November - 321, 132 by ambulance. December - 425, 123 by ambulance. January, today is the 10th, they have already seen 108 patients from Martin County, 31 by ambulance. My question is how many of them had a ride back home. They don’t bring them back home, remember that.” Ms. Perry stated that she went to the rescue and fire department of Williamston and stated that, “Williamston Rescue has made 657 trips to Bertie since August. They have made 92 trips to Beaufort County since August. They’ve made 34 to Greenville, 2 to Tarboro, and the ones that made it to Tarboro was emergency, emergency, emergency. That’s why they had to take them to Tarboro. Now, I talked to Mr. Peaks, they have spent in funds in gas, \$8, 261.79. Compared to what they spent before this, same months of August to December, in 2022 they only spent \$3,430.97. Who fault is this you all? Look at them; look at them up there that is whose fault this is, because we don’t have a hospital. This is their fault.

Ms. Perry began to comment on Jamesville EMS statistics when a Commissioner informed Ms. Perry that the 3-minute public comment time limit was completed. Ms. Perry continued to make her public comment stating, “But I got one thing I got to say. The young man we buried on Saturday, and Ronnie you know who I’m talking about now, this is on you. That was my great nephew that they killed in the streets and that blood is on every single one of you all’s hands. I want you to know that. It’s on you, Dempsey, it’s on you. That’s right. That blood is on you all.”

Mr. Chip Myers -1010 W. Main Street, Williamston, NC 27892

Mr. Myers stated, “I come to you on the behalf of the dead of Martin County. They couldn’t make it, so I’m here for their voice. I’m one of the medical examiners for the County. Currently, we don’t have a hospital, we don’t have paramedic level of care in the town, we also don’t have a morgue. So, we’re not able to take care of even our dead. Since August 2023, we’ve not had a morgue that the medical examiners can access. Currently, our deceased are going to ECU. We can’t get to them there. As a medical examiner, it’s my duty to be their last voice. I can’t do that. General Statute 130A – 381, each County shall provide or contract for a appropriate facility for the examination and storage of bodies under the medical examiner jurisdiction. That’s your responsibility right? And we’re not doing that. Trish Fore of the Office of the State Medical Examiner contacted our County Manager and pointed this out to you right? Unfortunately we’re still not there, we don’t have a facility. Now that the hospital lease is back physically, it would be great to reopen the morgue and used that or find some another place, so we can do our jobs, so we can do what’s proper for our deceased. Currently, if we had a morgue, we would collect revenue from each patient in there or each deceased in there. That money is going to ECU. If we had a morgue open at the hospital, that hospital would be generating revenue. Not a great deal, but at least it would be getting some money, as opposed to just sitting there empty. I just think, it seems to be smart to find at least some place so that we can do our job. The dead of Martin County are

asking you basically to do what you're mandated to do. It's your job." Mr. Myers asked the Board if there were any questions and provided a document to support his public comment. The Clerk has filed the document with the original agenda packet.

Commissioner Gurganus stated he had been sitting in his position for a long time or what felt like a long time. Commissioner Gurganus stated that what he heard, rightfully so, was that the residents did not trust the Board and the Board was doing very little to fix it. Commissioner Gurganus stated that he didn't see the Board doing anything to fix the trust issues. Commissioner Gurganus stated that either the Board didn't want the residents to trust them, the Board maybe didn't care that the residents trusts them, or they did not deserve the positions as the residents stated. Commissioner Gurganus stated that Martin County was the laughing stock in Raleigh. Commissioner Gurganus reported that there were hospital providers and the Board was hoping the providers would be interested in joining the County. Commissioner Gurganus asked who would want to be a part of the "clown show" and stated that he wouldn't. Commissioner Gurganus stated that the Board couldn't keep acting like nothing mattered month after month. Commissioner Gurganus stated that the County needed to fix this and he would do what he needed to do. Commissioner Gurganus asked if it was his fault because he asked about a raise.

Chairman Bond Jr. responded with a comment regarding the Board being able to participate in an opportunity that had not been done in North Carolina before. Commissioner Gurganus asked if that opportunity excused everything that was going on. Comments were made from the public regarding the closure of the hospital.

Commissioner Smith asked to make the Motion to Enter Closed Session.

CLOSED SESSION – NC G.S. § 143-318.11. (a)(3) – Client/Attorney Privilege and NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (6) – Personnel

At 9:31 p.m., Commissioner Smith made a **Motion** to enter Closed Session for NC G.S. § 143-318.11. (a)(3) – Client/Attorney Privilege and NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(6) – Personnel in matters related to the Manning and Lilley versus Martin County , with a **Second** from Commissioner Biggs. Motion **Carried** unanimously by raise of hands (4-1).

Ayes: Chairman Dempsey Bond Jr., Vice Chair Emily Biggs, Commissioner Ronnie Smith, and Commissioner David "Skip" Gurganus
Nays: Commissioner Joe R. Ayers

At 10:07 p.m. Commissioner Gurganus made a **Motion** to go out of Closed Session NC G.S. § 143-318.11. (a)(3) – Client/Attorney Privilege and NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (6) – Personnel in matters related to the Manning and Lilley versus Martin County, with a **Second** from Commissioner Smith. Motion **Carried** unanimously by raise of hands (5-0).

OPEN SESSION

Interim County Manager Eisner reported that he would keep his time and expenses for the previous calendar month to be review and approved by the Board, as stated in his agreement with the County as the Interim County Manager. The invoice totaled in \$4,163.29, which was inclusive of expenses

at the mileage rate. Interim County Manager Eisner reported that Human Resources and the Finance Office audited the itemized invoice. Interim County Manager Eisner asked for approval from the Board.

Commissioner Smith made the **Motion** to Approve of Interim County Manager Benjamin Eisner's itemized invoice for the month of December 2023, with a **Second** by Commissioner Gurganus. Motion was **Carried** unanimously by raise of hands (5-0).

BOARD REPORTS/COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS- NONE

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, at 10:09 pm, Commissioner Smith **Motioned** to Adjourn and Commissioner Gurganus **Seconded** the motion. Motion **Carried** by adjournment.

The next Regular Board Meeting for the Martin County Board of Commissioners has been scheduled for February 14, 2024.

Dempsey Bond Jr., Chairman
Martin County Board of Commissioners

Julia S. Rease
Clerk to the Board