

Martin County Board of Commissioners
Planning and Budget Retreat
February 24th and 25th, 2021

The Martin County Board of Commissioners along with Department Heads gathered at Moratoc Park, 102 River Drive, Williamston, NC for a Planning and Budget retreat on February 24th and 25th, 2021.

On Wednesday, February 24th, 2021, the following Commissioners and Staff were in attendance: Chairman Ronnie Smith, Vice Chairman Dempsey Bond, Jr., Commissioner Joe R. Ayers (arrived at 10:30 a.m.), Commissioner Emily Biggs, Commissioner David “Skip” Gurganus, County Manager James Bennett, Clerk to the Board Jessica Godard, and Finance Officer Cindy Ange. Other Department Heads in attendance: IT Director Jeb Gardner, Soil and Water Conservation Supervisor Lynn Whitehurst, TDA Director Barney Conway, Public Works Director Justin Harrison, DSS/Transit Director Angela Ellis, Board of Elections Director Kristy Modlin, Communications Director Jason Steward, Adult and Aging Services Director Lisa Edmonds, Marketing and Outreach Specialist Madison Beacham, Water District Supervisor Ed Warren, and Economic Development Director Jason Semple.

Breakfast was served for the group.

The first speaker of the day was Mr. Carl Torbush, former football coach. Mr. Torbush spoke about the importance of faith, family and friends in life. He spoke about leadership and used the acronym B.E.L.I.E.V.E. B – believe in each other and things not yet seen; E – empower people by encouragement; L – learn and press on towards the goal; I – influence by being a positive role model; E – encourage others; V – visualize excellence; and E – enjoy life experiences. He also spoke about the importance of respect, and other importance aspects when working with other people. In closing, Mr. Torbush shared some inspirational quotes for encouragement. County Manager Bennett thanked Coach Torbush for his words and stated he would be receiving a token of appreciation in the mail, since he was unable to attend in person.

The second speaker was Ms. Galen Miller. She spoke about her family’s history with breeding Arabian horses. She spoke about horses being facilitators, helping people with mental and physical disabilities, and she became an equine facilitator. She spoke about leadership qualities, a non-predatory approach leadership, and collaboration. Ms. Miller discussed the five roles in a herd and an organization: leader, dominant, sentinel, nurturer/companion, and predator. She discussed the characteristics and importance of each role, both in herds and in organizations.

The next speaker was Mr. Kenny Flowers, Assistant Secretary of Rural Economic Development with the NC Department of Commerce. Mr. Lee Padrick with Community Planning Services joined him out of the Greenville, NC office. Mr. Flowers spoke of the importance of the assets in rural North Carolina, and many opportunities to levy those assets and resources to make North Carolina a stronger state. Chairman Smith spoke about House Bill 119, stating the NCACC was

pushing back on the bill because of the potential negative impacts on funding. Vice Chairman Bond spoke about the prime location of Martin County within North Carolina and the presence of a railroad, and advocated for continued support of this area to help with industrial and economic growth. Mr. Flowers continued to speak about potential future opportunities for Martin County.

Ms. Miller and Mr. Flowers were presented with gifts from Martin County and certificates signed by Chairman Smith.

Department/Agency Presentations

Economic Development

EDC President Jason Semple spoke to the Board regarding a shell-speculative building proposal. He shared historical state level data about projects that have requested a building over the past several years. He also highlighted industries recruited to Martin County over the past twenty years that had located to an existing vacant building. President Semple discussed two options for a shell building project – Option 1 (Martin County Quick Start II) and Option 2 – Industrial Incubator. President Semple discussed the funding for each project (EDC Contributions/Golden LEAF/U.S. CAIP) and what would be requested from the County for each option.

Discussions were had regarding building requirements for certain companies, including ceiling heights. The question was raised about what Martin County currently had to offer. President Semple stated the hot dog plant building on McCaskey Road was available, and that building had some challenges. There was also a building in Jamesville that was purchased and leased for storage. The former Parkdale Mills building was also discussed. County Manager Bennett asked if the Parkdale building was on the website for potential investors to see. He stated it was not as of now, but it would be in the first quarter of the next fiscal year with the update of the website.

Tourism Development Authority

TDA Executive Director Barney Conway was present to provide information about TDA. He briefly discussed the past accomplishments of the TDA, spoke about the local billboards and Martin County promotions. Executive Director discussed various projects, events, and assets around Martin County sponsored by TDA. Conway talked briefly about the TDA objectives and the potential visitor response. County Manager Bennett asked what resources the TDA was requesting, and Mr. Conway stated the TDA gave money to Martin County. Mr. Conway

Martin County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Manning began his presentation with the mission of the Sheriff's Office. Sheriff Manning discussed some accomplishments and changes that had been made within the Sheriff's office, including change in response to resistance policy. Sheriff Manning discussed the security provided

at the Governmental Center during COVID, assistance provided to Martin County Schools and MTW District Health during COVID.

Sheriff Manning discussed the security that was provided during COVID, and stated single point-of-entry would have been very useful in keeping the courthouse open during COVID. The courthouse was re-opened after being closed for several weeks, with the assistance of School Resource Officers.

Challenges included the temporary hold on the community policing efforts and courtroom requirements and security. Other items discussed included an increase in court duties and the increase in the number of pistol purchase permits and concealed weapons permits over the previous seven months. Other accomplishments discussed included senior meal deliver, hot car demonstration, response to Bertie County tornado (fleet of military vehicles). Sheriff Manning stated the fleet of military vehicles was an asset for Martin County and felt that program did not need to go away. There was very little maintenance and cost associated with the vehicles, due to getting supplies from military surplus. Chairman Smith spoke about the surplus program stating it was a good program.

Sheriff Manning discussed Martin County Animal Shelter numbers and spoke about upgrades to the facility. Other accomplishments include the purchase of a new K9 to replace the retired K9, and the purchase and installation of new fingerprint machine.

Sheriff Manning discussed the number of COVID-19 emergency leave hours that were utilized from May – December 2020. Sheriff Manning spoke about the COVID-19 grant that the Sheriff's Office applied for, the Governor's Crime Commission Grant, and future plans for the Sheriff's Office (door-to-door community policing, church security assessments, National Night Out, reducing number of animals being euthanized and increase adoptions, addition of 2 full-time positions for the Governmental Center, and replace 6 patrol vehicles and body camera storage server). Sheriff Manning stated most other courthouses in the district have security, and felt now was the time to add security to the Governmental Center.

Commissioner Gurganus spoke about an incident where he witnessed a young man get arrested at the Courthouse, stating a simple situation escalated quickly. Sheriff Manning stated had the Deputies not been there, the situation could have been worse. Commissioner Gurganus spoke of another situation in a neighborhood behind the courthouse, stating security was needed because bad things were happening very close by.

Building Inspector/Emergency Management

Jody Griffin spoke about accomplishments and challenges for Inspections. Challenges were due to not being able to have direct contact or be face-to-face for issuance of permits and performing inspections in the COVID environment. There was an increase in permits and inspections. Goals for inspections included utilizing virtual inspections methods, having deputy Building Inspector

achieving additional certifications, hiring an apprentice to begin training in preparation for the future, and continue overall improvements for future ISO (International Organization for Standardization) evaluations.

Emergency Management/Fire Marshal

Accomplishments and challenges for this department included procurement of PPD, navigating report requirements for COVID to NC Emergency Management, establishment of protocols for 911 dispatching of first responders to known COVID patients, obtaining equipment through CARES funding, and obtained a heavy duty truck for transport of equipment.

Goals included maintaining requirements for continued Emergency Management Performance grant funding, continue working with Sheriff's office to procure additional supplies and equipment, procure budget funding for the construction of a 60x100 equipment shelter and fenced storage area near Communications and Sheriff's storage building (to house equipment under a roof – equipment will have to be moved from the current location), and continue seeking funding for sources for radio upgrades prior to the NCSHP radio system migration in 2025.

County Manager Bennett asked for an estimate on the cost of the proposed 60x100 shelter, Mr. Griffin stated approximately \$55,000. Next, County Manager Bennett asked about funding requests the replacement of the radios and Mr. Griffin stated at this time, staff was hoping for grants to fund that project.

Bertie-Martin Regional Jail

Jail Administrator Terrence Whitehurst was present to discuss Bertie-Martin Regional Jail. He reviewed the mission statement and the background of Bertie-Martin Regional Jail. He discussed previous capacity and shared the current capacity for the facility was 90 (83 males and 7 females).

Next, Administrator Whitehurst discussed the accomplishments of BMR Jail, including zero COVID-19 outbreaks in 2020, various maintenance repairs and upgrades, and zero suicides and zero escapes in 2020. In addition, BMR Jail had employee referral bonuses.

Administrator Whitehurst discussed the goals and objectives for BMR Jail in 2021-2022, including recruiting and retaining detention staff, enhancing safety for staff and inmates, and workplace environment enhancement. The jail currently had 16 full-time staff working, but there were 24 spots, and the jail was still functioning. When asked about the available slots, Administrator Whitehurst stated there were five openings, and there were three staff members that had been out on worker's compensation for an extended period. Staff was working to fill the open positions.

Resources needed to accomplish the goals of BMR Jail included financial contributions from both Bertie and Martin counties, two part-time positions, local fitness centers, community college or e-learning (training), and new construction facility via grant funded financial assistance. There had

been discussions over the past couple of years between Bertie and Martin County Commissioners and the BMR Regional Jail Commission about potentially building a new facility, but that was at a standstill due to finances. Staff would work to try to find grants and other forms of funding to be able to proceed with that project.

Vice Chairman Bond offered comments regarding the potential jail construction, stating Chowan County was interested in joining Bertie and Martin Counties to form a regional jail. Chairman Smith stated public safety had been discussed in previous legislative goals conversations, but he had advocated for regional jails to have some attention in legislation for potential funding.

County Manager Bennett asked about monies for the upgrades in the ventilation system. Finance Officer Cindy Ange stated staff was in negotiations with FEMA for funds, and it was not known whether money to reimburse for that project would be FEMA money or CARES money. When asked about funds needed for two part-time employees, it was estimated to be around \$40,000 together.

BREAK FOR LUNCH

Communications

Communications Manager Jason Steward presented on Communications, first starting with the mission statement and background of the department. Manager Steward discussed the many functions of Communications, from answering emergency calls, and serving as an after-hours on call service for many services in Martin County.

Manager Steward stated 60-70% of their funding was local funding, however they did receive some state funding from the NC 911 Board. Manager Steward talked about the new facility and shared it was paid for 100% by a grant from the NC 911 Board. He spoke about the facility being a back-up facility for Bertie and Pasquotank counties.

The 911 Center currently had 10 staff members (1 Director, 1 Assistant Director, 1 Addressing Specialist/Telecommunicator, 4 shift leaders, and 3 telecommunicates). Manager Steward discussed the emergency response plan/addressing and the importance of that information for Fire/EMS and emergency response.

Manager Steward discussed the three-year call data, showing a significant increase in the number of calls from 2018 to 2020. Next, Manager Steward showed pictures of staff, stating they did a great job.

Next, Manager Steward discussed the accomplishments during the past year, including adapting to post-covid emergency services environment, maintaining certifications, and maintaining service. He discussed system upgrades, and spoke about employee recognition and certifications. Communications staff also assisted Washington county with backup plans, technology plan, and

ESInet onboarding. Other accomplishments included community service (toys for tots) and maintaining a social media presence to keep the community updated on important information.

Goals discussed included additional certifications for staff, enhance protocols for Telecommunicators, increased frequency of staff feedback and training, cultural awareness training for staff, Telecommunicator ride-along with responders and/or staff to learn geography and the other side of the response, and providing a better work/life balance for staff.

Manager Steward spoke about the many changes that have taken place in 911 over the past several years, and stated the current staffing model of two Telecommunicators per shift was not sustainable. There was not enough staff to answer calls if one staff member was on an extended medical call. Also not taken into account was meal breaks, emergencies, or other variables. Martin County Communications had only added one staff member in the past thirty years. Manager Steward stated the current minimum staffing model required eight full-time communicators and Martin County Communications had seven allotted currently.

Resourced need to achieve goals included additional staffing to help meet the goals set forth for the department. The proposal included the creation of three Telecommunicator 1 positions (minimum salary of \$28,008 plus benefits each) to allow the filling of the eight position and take the addressing specialist and assistant director off the floor during peak times. This would also address issues with trainings, and allow staff to have a better work/life balance.

Steward stated Martin County had the most up to date facility in the region and the best trained staff in the region, as well. In conclusion, stated sufficient staff was needed to continue to maintain, again asking for three additional staff.

County Manager Bennett asked what constituted peak times for 911. Manager Steward stated there was really no pattern, but from noon to midnight seemed to be the peak time for Martin County Communications, and felt that was the time that an additional person would be needed. Discussions were had about potential change in shift schedules, but Manager Steward stated the 12-hour shift model was best.

Martin County Public Works

Public Works Director Justin Harrison was available to discuss the various structural maintenance projects throughout the County. Some of the accomplishments discussed included Barnes House renovations, Kayak launching platform refurbishment, tobacco log barn repairs, Farmer's Market overflow parking lot, Moratoc Park flooring, Kehukee Office Building signage project and storage addition, County office building restroom remodel, and the on-going trails grant. Director Harrison discussed in more detail the trail budget and where the funding would be coming from, as well as the budget timeline.

Other accomplishments included converting to energy-saving lighting, installing safety devices on the gates at Transit, re-keying county buildings, NCDOT grant for a storage building at transit, and other daily tasks/work orders.

Goals for structural maintenance included continuing to convert to energy-saving lighting and natural gas, on-going trail grant, transit storage building grant, install new siding on Moratoc Park building, remodel District courtroom (some county funds may be needed for this project due to decreased court funds because of COVID), Industrial park-dozer work and spray rail spur, dozer work at Martin County airport, controlled burn behind airport terminal building, cosmetic renovations of the Health department building, install drop ceilings in senior center, courthouse cooling tower (preventative maintenance repairs), purchase of dump truck or dump trailer with water department, and ventilation fan install at Farmer's Market.

Next, Director Harrison discussed the accomplishments for the landfill, which included the purchase of a used compactor, mowing, the opening of a small C&D approved site (still ongoing), surveying of active site for height restrictions, replacing electric services, improving drainage, and other daily tasks. Director Harrison stated the original plan for a compactor purchase was a five-year financial plan at \$60,000 per year (total of \$300,000). Staff purchased a used compactor this year and saved the County around \$200,000 from the original plan.

Staff was making progress at the landfill regardless of daily tonnage. The compactor was helping to get longer life out of the landfill site. Staff purchased a tractor and mower with approximately a \$9,000 savings for the County from original plan. The tractor was used for daily tasks at the landfill, but also for other tasks such as snow removal and grading of rock parking lots, etc. Staff was working on opening a small C&D site that was approved by the state in 2018.

Goals for the landfill included construction of a convenience site for roll-off containers at the landfill, installing metal racks for TV storage (recycling program), repairs to the metal equipment building at the landfill, the final phase of the opening the C&D small approved site, and improve drainage.

Currently, when waste was brought to the landfill, the items had to be placed in a piece of equipment and then placed into the containers. That required staff and could become a safety issue. With the roll-off containers, residents could simply drive up to a site and dispose of their waste. This would help staff and be safer for citizens.

Discussions about price per ton were discussed. The current price was \$40 per ton. Areas around Martin County were charging \$80 per ton. Staff was seeing an increase in contractors disposing of materials due to the cost, many likely from outside of Martin County. Every 2,000 pounds costs \$40, but the cost is broken down by the pound if the load does not equal one ton (except exempt items).

Soil and Water Conservation

Lynn Whitehurst discussed the Soil & Water Conservation Board, and the mission statement of the division. The division participates with the NC Ag Cost Sharing Program for funding for various projects. Various accomplishments in Martin County included storm debris removal caused by Hurricane Matthew. The district was able to purchase a John Deere Gator and trailer with grant funding, and the division was in the process of securing a boat, motor, and trailer.

Mr. Whitehurst discussed other accomplishments and yearly goals. Associated programs discussed included Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - \$104,000, Conservation Security Program (CSP) - \$67,000, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - \$153,292.

Next, Mr. Whitehurst discussed the goals of the division, including maintenance plans for streams in Martin County, a funding match from the state of NC and the County of Martin to maintain the waterways, and continue to lobby for increased funding from the NC Ag Cost Share Program.

Future resources needed included a surveying instrument (\$2,000), office space for a new NRCS employee (was currently advertised), and storm debris removal grant to provide a Jon boat motor and trailer, a kayak, and storage space.

Martin County Social Services and Transit

DSS Director Angela Ellis discussed the purpose and mission of DSS. Director Ellis provided a brief overview of the DSS department roles and functions. There were currently 64 positions within DSS and 13 within Transit. There were 6 vacancies and 1 upcoming retirement within the department.

Ms. Ellis discussed some of the past accomplishments, including management team reconfiguring, clean audit for Medicaid/Work First/Financials, served 70 children at Christmas and those that DSS served as guardians, established permanency for 14 children, and collaborated with community partners to provide education on the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles.

Other accomplishments included continued collaboration to start a Safe Sleep campaign, partnering with community to fill the food pantry, met state performance measures for FNS, Energy, Work First, and Day Care programs. Medicaid passed state report card for 12 out of 12 months. Staff continued to provide transportation to medical appointments and to COVID-19 vaccination sites.

Resources needed included filing vacant positions, laptops and computers for backup and telework (possibly 5 computers as recommended by Jeb), renovations of office space, having all of DSS in one building, a homeless shelter, a county soup kitchen, and affordable housing. The latter requests may be on-going requests. Chairman Smith stated a soup kitchen may be possible in the near future, with a location out in the county. He also mentioned the possibility of using Transit in the future to meet the needs of citizens regarding food availability.

Goals included continuing to strengthen county partnerships, advocate for increase in pay for employees, promote county benefits package as well as advocate for employee benefits, develop a plan to attract and retain qualified social workers, research and apply for grant to meet the needs of the county (i.e. soup kitchen, homeless shelters).

County Manager Bennett asked Ms. Ellis to speak on Medicaid transportation. He stated the cost of the program was unknown, and could be a large cost that Martin County could potentially be responsible, and Martin County could get some reimbursement. Ms. Ellis spoke about Medicaid transformation. Martin County transit provides Medicaid transportation, and recipients would have to choose a provider for Medicaid coverage (including transportation). Martin County was looking at contracting with two providers. DSS would have someone from the State come to their March meeting to discuss Medicaid transportation. County Manager Bennett asked if the cost of the trips could be negotiated with the providers, Ms. Ellis stated whatever was in the contract is what the County would be obligated to pay. The contracts were not yet signed, so Ms. Ellis said there could be a possibility of negotiating the rate of reimbursement.

Finance Officer Cindy Ange gave a shout out to DSS employees on how they handled getting Christmas gifts to their clients, even during a COVID outbreak in the department.

Adult and Aging Services

Director Lisa Edmonds shared the mission statement of Adult and Aging Services/Council on Aging. Director Edmonds reviewed the services and programs that were currently offered by Adult and Aging Services. Meals were still being delivered to congregate and home delivered clients. Adjustments had been made in other programs to adapt to COVID. The Housing and Home improvement program typically served around 15 houses per year. The Bargain Shoppe had been closed, which was the biggest money maker for the department, and staff hoped to be able to re-open soon.

Accomplishments of the department included the continuation of providing services and meals, assisting MTW District Health Department with COVID vaccine clinics, providing pet food to seniors through grants, starting a “pull up for pull-ups” program. Ms. Edmonds also discussed the Medicare Part D program that saved citizens \$1,505,505 (record breaking number).

Goals of the department included continuing to meet the needs and requests of Martin County seniors and their caregivers, opening the facility back to the public, opening back the Bargain Shoppe, hire more CNAs for the personal care program, provide internet service to all sites, discussions about a larger facility for Jamesville, and recruit volunteers.

Chairman Smith stated the Robersonville site was very small, as they were using the housing authority building. He discussed the possibility of looking for a different location for the Robersonville site.

Resources needed to accomplish goals included awesome staff and teamwork, volunteers, additional staff (one staff member was lost in the summer and was not replaced), funding, Bagraim Shoppe income, and support of local government and Council on Aging Board.

Commissioner Biggs asked how many pets were being helped; Ms. Edmonds stated 7 or 8 were being helped. Chairman Smith asked how many people across the county were not receiving any food/meals. Ms. Edmonds stated she did not know, but they did not currently have a waiting list for home delivered meals.

Veteran's Services

Ms. Theodosia Robinson discussed the current duties of the County Veteran's Service Officer. Next, Ms. Robinson discussed the accomplishments of the Veteran's Service Office, including maintaining accreditation, sponsoring Annual Veteran's seminars, obtaining Veteran's transportation grant, shadow box program, participating in establishing a Martin County Veteran's Council, Hamilton Veteran's Home and cemetery project participation, and weekly PTSD class.

Goals included continuing to maintain accreditation, obtaining another Veteran's transportation grant, continue partnership with shadow box program, continue Veteran's seminar, build on efforts to establish a Martin County Veteran's Council, continue to host weekly PTSD class, and other. In addition, Ms. Robinson had a goal of renovating the building that represents the Martin County Veterans.

Resources needed to accomplish goals included capital funding for exterior painting of the building, interior painting of the building, replace carpet, repair and update both bathrooms, and mount the US flags that represent each Branch of the military onto the building.

Tax Assessor

Tax Assessor Elisha Hardison highlighted the accomplishments of the Tax Assessor's office, including adding 20,930,266 of value (\$163,535 levy) to Martin County for 2020 for tax. The Tax Assessor was voted in for a 6-year term on the NC Property Mappers Association (first time in 40 years Martin County has served this association). The department completed a joint statewide project with NC 911 – 5th in the state to complete Q3 status. Staff updated the GIS arterial photography in September 2020 with updated photography.

Goals for 2021 included finding unlisted/added values in a decreasing economy, work on a solution for the solid waste availability issues, gear up for a revaluation effective 2025, add valuable information to the GIS website, go live with e-recording and work on survey map e-recording, interlink the GIS with the Register of Deeds office.

Discussions were held regarding NCPTS (North Carolina Property Tax Solutions) and whether or not that software would be good for Martin County. Chairman Smith asked Ms. Hardison to speak

with some other counties and find out if that software would be a good fit. County Manager Bennett asked Ms. Hardison if money was set aside each year for the revaluation cost, and she stated that was done each year. Further discussions were had regarding the NCPTS system and how much that system would potentially cost Martin County.

Resources for 2021 included Pictometry/EagleView (would provide highly orthomosaic and oblique imagery and 360-degree views – delivers a complete virtual solution for making accurate planning decisions without the time, expense, and safety risk of onsite visits). The cost would include 3 projects over 6 years: \$66,686.50 a project \$33,343.25 a year budget. This software would benefit staff and citizens, and would help during revaluations, as well. Ms. Hardison took pride in her department and being able to provide quality customer service to the citizens.

Martin County Tax Collector

Ms. Christie Blevins discussed the accomplishments of the department including: collected 98% of budget to date for current year ad valorem taxes, increase office security and employee safety through reallocation of work space, cross training on utility billing payment plans and customer service, update website payment processing to include online utility payments (in process), simplifile training for all staff members to facilitate e-record (in process), various trainings, and maintaining outstanding customer service during the pandemic.

Goals and objectives included: increase collection rate by focusing on all enforced collection remedies including foreclosures, continuing education training for all staff, effective management of resources, efficiency in the management and organizational skills, management of retention schedules, continued focused on improving customer relations and service, and collect taxes for the Town of Robersonville.

Resources needed: no capital needs, only requesting increased funding for office supplies and funding for continuing education training.

Martin County LPA

Ms. Blevins discussed accomplishments including: PCI compliance and other trainings, outstanding customer service despite substantial increase in volume due to closing of the Beaufort County LPA, recipient of the LPA Performance bonus (2 years in a row), efficient management of resources and record retention, and successful implementation of all DMV changes via broadcast messages and emails.

Goals and objectives included compliance with all mandatory agency trainings, continued emphasis on customer service and limiting the error rate, effective time management and teamwork, attentive to all LPA updates via broadcast message and emails, and timely and efficient review of all title work.

Resources needed included: no capital needs, only increased funding for office supplies and two new chairs.

Chairman Smith commended Ms. Blevins and all of her staff for the good work they do.

Board of Elections

Board of Elections Director Kristy Modlin shared voter turnout statistics since 2014, stating the November 2020 voter turnout was 76.19%. Next, Director Modlin shared absentee statistics and voter registration statistics.

Director Modlin spoke about a grant the county would be receiving, and that could help pay to combine some precincts and new voting equipment (1/2 of equipment cost). The last equipment was purchased in 2006.

Director Modlin wanted to keep using the tools she had to keep the public informed (Facebook, Instagram, new website).

Director Modlin shared a quote, “An informed voter – no matter for which party – is a good voter”.

County Manager Bennett asked Ms. Modlin what resources she needed, and she said none other than what the state tells her she needs to do.

Chairman Smith stated director Modlin did so many thing by herself, and he was afraid that if something were to happen, she would not have any backup.

End of Day One of Retreat

Day 2 – February 25, 2021

Register of Deeds

Register of Deeds Kimberly Griffin was unable to attend. Assistant Register of Deeds Lois Beck was present. Ms. Beck reviewed the staff of the Register of Deeds office and reviewed the mission statement and history. Ms. Beck reviewed what documents were recorded by the Register of Deeds office, and reviewed vital records and other services that were provided by the office. Ms. Beck reviewed how members of the public may go about obtaining records from their office.

Next, Ms. Beck reviewed the accomplishments of the Register of Deeds office, including: began cleanup of images of real estate records previously scanned, notary commissions/recommissions done electronically, completion of advanced Register of Deeds school, Completion of certification program for Deputy, continuing education workshops, educational/legislative conference (virtual),

annual conference (virtual), support for local Boys & Girls Club, leadership academy, vice chair of District VIII, land records management advisory & Indexing Committee for the NC Register of Deeds Association (NCARD), and special recognition-awards NCARDS.

Goals and objectives included: begin electronic real estate recording, offer credit card services to purchase vital record, convert part-time position to a full-time position, purchase new office equipment-chairs, upgrade computer processors, district workshop completions, educational/legislative conference participation, annual Register of Deeds conference participation, continuing education, complete leadership academy, continue clean-up of images of scanned real estate records, and offer vital records requests online.

Resources included personnel needs: full-time staff in lieu of part-time staff. Ms. Beck provided supporting information to support the request for a full-time staff member.

Chairman Smith thanked Ms. Beck and Ms. Griffin and staff for providing the numbers and comparisons and supporting data for the personnel request.

Data Processing

IT Director Jeb Gardner highlighted help desk statistics for 2020, totaling 509 support requests that were recorded (35% social services, 20% infrastructure, 17% Sheriff's office, and 28% other departments).

Mr. Gardner then reviewed the county footprint for 2020 – the county network connects 11 sites 3 data centers, and over 700 devices. Accomplishments included: phone system upgrades, workstation deployments (CARES funding), remote workers/teleworking, new county website, infrastructure, cyber-security, and audio & video expansions. Goals and objectives included: server upgrades, cybersecurity, MUNIS upgrades, going live with new tax payment portal/new point of sales/online water payments, replace PRI phone service with SIP, consolidate fax lines and invest in IP faxing, and consider reducing IT support cost by eliminated contract services (\$108,576 annually at a rate of \$105/hour – current agreement expired 6/30/21).

Resources needed included: Capital – server 2019 licensing, services and maintenance agreements, DSL upgrade. Personnel – full time technician to replace dependence on contracted support – salary with benefits would not exceed \$55,000 annually – reducing operating budget by at least \$50,000.

Martin County Water District 1 and District 2

Water District Manager Ed Warren introduced himself and welcomed the new Commissioners and new County Manager. Accomplishments included: distributed quality water from the water authority well in district 1 and the water authority water treatment plant in district 2 to approximately 4,715 Martin County citizens with no violations of state public water supply

standards and total compliance with permitted monitoring and reporting requirements. Also, maintained the “Hassell well” in district 1 and the “Ed’s Grocery well” in district 2 ready for backup during peak demand periods and emergencies.

Staff maintained approximately 1980 services for residential, commercial, and institutional accounts. Installed four new service taps (plus two pending) to date in district 1 and seven new service taps (plus one pending) in district 2. Maintained continuous water service through COVID pandemic since February 2020 including: complying with executive orders 124 and 142 which allowed the continuation of service without paying. Staff had to offer customers the opportunity to sign up for a sixth-month payment plan. 261 offers were sent and approximately 64 payment plans were initiated. Assisted in one water system technician in attending the C-distribution operator certification school virtually. Purchased one new vehicle for use by a water system technician. Continued service contract with Gregory Poole to perform maintenance on mobile emergency generator twice per year.

County Manager Bennett asked about the generator maintenance and asked what certifications staff held, the highest certification, Mr. Warren stated the generator was exercised regularly. Mr. Warren stated there was well certifications and distributions certifications. Two staff members had C-well certifications. County Manager Bennett asked if Mr. Warren could be an ORC operator, he stated yes he was an ORC Operator for C-wells. County Manager Bennett asked if staff was compensated when they passed a test/certification, Mr. Warren stated yes. County Manager Bennet asked if the Town of Williamston staff had the same certifications, and Mr. Warren stated he wasn’t exactly sure what certifications their staff held. He asked if the increases given were sufficient for staff, Mr. Warren stated he said he did feel it was adequate. Currently salaries were discussed.

Vice Chairman Bond asked if anyone on his staff was certified for surface water and Mr. Warren stated no. Experience was needed in the area of practice in order to sit for the certification exam. County Manager Bennett asked about how many services were active in the county, and asked how many customers were in Robersonville. Mr. Warren did not know how many customers Robersonville had. Discussions were had regarding a hypothetical situation of taking on Robersonville water system. Mr. Warren talked about the current lines that were down in the county. Further discussions were had regarding the water supply to the Industrial Park, and Mr. Warren stated the current county lines were not capable of delivering a direct supply to the industrial park. Staff and Commissioners discussed additional lines and available service in the Robersonville area that were owned by Martin County, and whether or not the Martin County system and the Robersonville system could be connected.

Goals and objectives included: replace one truck, install automated sump pump in three underground vaults in district 2, purchase one dump trailer or dump truck (possibly sharing cost with other departments), assist water system technicians in obtaining training and testing to obtain well and distribution operator certifications, continue meter replacement program, continue

maintenance contract on emergency generator, continue to provide high quality and reliable source of water to customers in both water districts.

Discussions were had about the meter system and whether or not the system would save labor. Mr. Warren stated yes. IT Director Jeb Gardner stated the current system the water department was using was an old system. Mr. Warren stated the readings could be done in a much shorter amount of time if the automatic meters were used. Mr. Warren had looked into cost for making that change years ago, and at the time it was approximately \$600,000 to do both districts.

County Manager Bennett stated the water situation had become very difficult without a sufficient customer base, and it was his understanding that within 2-3 years, the county would be in serious trouble. Finance Officer Ange stated the water districts had been in trouble since the beginning, and staff budgeted to lose money each year. District 2 owed the general fund over \$1 million.

Chairman Smith stated Martin County had been added to a distressed water system list due to the current financial situation. He spoke about this particular program, and stated Bethel had recently received some relief. He stated if Martin County remained in the distressed category and appropriately responded, Martin County could qualify for some type of relief. He further discussed the debt that was created when the water treatment plant was built. He stated there were systems and grants out there that could possibly help distressed water systems with debt.

County Manager Bennett stated he had been going around to meet the Mayors in Martin County and talking about the possibility of letting Martin County provide water for them, increasing the customer base and lessen the amount of debt. Commissioner Biggs asked if a study had been done to see what it would look like for the county to be on one system. Chairman Smith stated the current legislation would pay for studies, as well. A regionalization study was done the previous year with the Town of Williamston. Commissioner Ayers stated conversations had taken place with municipalities and no interest was expressed to join with the county water, and stated there had never been an incentives for those municipalities and it was not a good financial system. EDC President Jason Semple stated there was some federal legislation out there for rural systems, stating there was some hope.

Vice Chairman Bond stated he thought that 1989 was when Martin County got in trouble with the water situation, citing the citizens in the 2-mile ETJ jurisdiction were paying their water bills to the Town of Williamston. The Town of Williamston does pay a certain amount to the County each year for the lines. Finance Officer Ange stated the County was in trouble the minute the water districts were formed. Chairman Smith stated not mandating citizens to be on the water system caused issues, as well. Chairman Smith felt optimistic there was hope for possible incentives for Martin County to find a solution.

Resources needed to accomplish goals: capital funding – one truck, contract to install three sump pump systems in district two vaults, dump trailer or dump truck; other – possible cost sharing with other department(s) on dump trailer/truck.

Chairman Smith asked the tap fee. Mr. Warren stated the fee was \$550 for ¾-inch tap and \$1,000 for a 1-inch tap. That price has been the same since the beginning.

Martin County Airport

Airport Manager Jesse Council provided a presentation on the Martin County Airport. Mr. Council stated the Airport contracted with Juliet Charles Aviation, which was cheaper for the County. Mr. Council provided information on the airport and described the property makeup of the Martin County Airport. Next, Mr. Council shared the history of the Martin County Airport.

Mr. Council talked about the economic impacts of the airport (according to the NCDOA), which included supporting 65 jobs, income, tax revenue, etc. Next, Mr. Council talked about the Wright Flight program and its history in Martin County Schools.

Chairman Smith spoke about the benefits of Wright Flight, and thanked the staff and volunteers of that program for the work done in that program. Mr. Council stated the future of Wright Flight would be for 6th graders instead of 5th graders.

County Manager Bennett stated Mr. Council had hopes of constructing an additional 10-plane t-hangar for the airport, to help bring in additional planes and revenue. Mr. Council already had eight potential people to lease a spot if that hangar was built. County Manager Bennett discussed the possibility of offering an incentive to the airport staff for every plane that was recruited.

Airport Manager Council stated air travel had decreased significantly due to COVID. Fuel sales for 2020 were also significantly decreased. Airport Manager Council thanked IT Director Jeb Gardner for all of his assistance at the airport. Council also talked about a fire hydrant that was installed at the airport that could be used by firefighters in airplanes.

Vice Chairman stated the RPO was pushing for a hangar for Martin County, to try to get funding for a hangar. He stated there were also plans to connect the airport to the industrial park. Council expressed his thanks for the support from the County and other partners for the airport. Discussions were had about other projects that had received funding from grants and other funds.

Commissioner Ayers expressed his thanks to Airport Manager Council for his hard work. Commissioner Ayers stated the airport did great things for Martin County. He stated Airport Manager Council had done such great things since being at the airport, stating the airport was the way it was because of Airport Manager Council and his staff.

Martin County Finance

Finance Officer Ange highlighted the tasks of the finance office, including finances for four entities: Martin County, Bertie Martin Regional Jail, Martin County TDA, and Martin County

Regional Water and Sewer Authority. Ms. Ange shared statistics of tasks completed by finance staff over the past year. She spoke about payroll responsibilities and banking obligations.

Accomplishments discussed included: FEMA – filed four projects worksheets for the County and three for the jail, CARES – monthly and annual reporting for the County and assisted municipalities with their allocations and reporting and upload to NCPRO office; Emergency Paid Sick Leave – federally mandated program for time off due to COVID (96 county employees used this program); Assist employees concerning COVID.

Other accomplishments discussed included: closed out the PSAP building project, evaluated and purchased software to assist with GASB 87, RFP for banking services, and successful audit.

Goals included: Implement GASB 87 and Debtbook. GASB 87 required most leases be capitalized and recorded on the balance sheet. This eliminated most operating leases and completely changed how leases were reported. GASB 87 is retroactive, and would be time consuming and complex. It would become effective July 2021, to be included on the financial statements for June 2022.

Other goals included completing CARES reporting, evaluate new copiers, update Personnel Action Form, create a Contract Tracking Form, provide timely and accurate information to departments and the citizens as requested, ensure a successful audit, and continue to work with the bank to reduce bank fees.

Resources needed: new lease software at \$5,500 per year after the first year. The first year of the software was \$4,500 in the current year and was taken out of the current budget.

Chairman Smith thanked Finance Officer Ange and her staff for their hard work. Finance Officer Ange stated she had a great staff and they worked well together. Commissioner Ayers echoed Chairman Smith's statements complementing the Finance Office staff.

Martin County Manager/Administration

County Manager Bennett talked about the tasks of the Clerk and County Manager. Some of the accomplishments over the past year included virtual meetings, hallway monitors, monthly newsletter, continuing education/trainings, and other tasks.

Goals for the next fiscal year included continuing to ensure staff attended applicable conferences and trainings, develop more funding sources through re-negotiated contracts, working with Department Heads in budgeting, providing COLA for all employees, work closely with Economic Development in helping recruit more business and retain existing businesses, finding ways to increase the water/sewer fund, maintain a balanced budget without having to levy a tax rate increase.

Resources needed: support the Board of Commissioners and staff, allowing staff to seek further training opportunities, and realization that employees are most important resources.

County Manager Bennett shared some additional potential objectives, such as holiday carry-over pay. Next, County Manager Bennett discussed a rescue grant program through Williamston Fire Department. The grant would pay 3 years' salary for two fire/rescue employees. The town of Williamston was proposing that Martin County pay for the salary of one of those employees at the end of the 3-year period. County Manager Bennett stated Jody Griffin was opposed to that. County Manager Bennett recalled monies that had been given to fire departments within the county in the past. Next, County Manager Bennett recalled the Robersonville water problem, stating he had been meeting with Mayors from around the county, and stated he believed there was a possibility that more towns would sign on to become a part of the county water system. County Manager Bennett proposed an increase in the amount charged for Moratoc Park rental (\$500 instead of \$400). The next item discussed was the tap fee for water services and whether or not that fee would continue to be appropriate.

EDC – Broadband Update

EDC President Jason Semple provided history on broadband in the area and discussed current broadband incentives. President Semple explained possible solutions to the broadband issue, included amending the general statutes.

President Semple discussed current initiatives, including the GREAT grant for CloudWyze that was currently on hold. President Semple also talked about Locality Networks based in Pinetops (potential to serve western/northern portions of Martin County in the next 1-3 years). The next incentive discussed was Rural Digital Opp Fund, which included FCC funds for underserved areas. A potential short-term solution was SimNet wireless, which worked off cell signal, but was not competitively priced.

Commissioners Deliberation

At this time, County Manager Bennett stated each Commissioner had 11 stars that they could place on items they felt were a priority. Chairman Smith stated broadband would be a top priority. Water consolidation for the County was a priority also for Chairman Smith. Next, Chairman Smith stated he wanted to ensure Medicaid Transformation would be coming in to play and that staff received proper training.

Next, Chairman Smith discussed the possibility of purchasing the East End school to be used by Martin County citizens (food banks, Adult and Aging Services Senior Center, etc.). He stated he had spoken with the Mayor of Robersonville and the Board of Education and the Robersonville Mayor stated Robersonville would possibly be willing to take on that building for use by citizens. Commissioner Ayers stated Robersonville was not in any financial shape to take on anything so

that caused concern for him. Chairman Smith stated Robersonville would still be there and the LGC was getting them back. Commissioner Ayers stated they had a tremendous amount of debt, but Chairman Smith stated they had written off \$800,000 of debt. He stated there would be no further discussion on that subject because it was unknown what the LGC would do with charter and Robersonville. He stated it wasn't an issue of having enough money, there was just a problem with mismanagement of their funds.

Commissioner Ayers main goal was to work with the departments to keep the budget in line with no tax increase.

Commissioner Biggs agreed with the other goals, but wanted to add goals of community policing and education support. She advocated for a bigger budget for the school system and making sure their needs were met. Chairman Smith added the importance of continuing a positive partnership with the Board of Education.

Vice Chairman Bond stated he would like to add his concerns about the school system and community college. He was interested in pathways that would be preparing students to go to work. He stated no one had discussed Martin Community College being involved, as Martin Community College was the institution that would issue certifications. He expressed the importance of training people for job.

County Manager Bennett stated each Commissioner had 11 stars, and each Commissioner would place a star on a line item that they felt was a priority. Chairman Smith asked County Manager Bennett to explain the expectations of the process. County Manager Bennett stated the line items with the most stars would get the most consideration during the budget preparation project.

At this time, Chairman Smith stated he was not throwing anyone out of the room, but he suggested that all of the department heads except the Finance Officer step out for the deliberations.

An amount of time of taken for the Commissioners to place their stars. After that, each Commissioner left.

Ronnie Smith, Chairman

Jessica Godard, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board