

**November 10, 2021**

The Martin County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Monthly Session on Wednesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Boardroom at the Martin County Governmental Center, 305 East Main Street, Williamston, North Carolina.

**ASSEMBLY**

Present in the Boardroom: Chairman Ronnie Smith, Commissioner Joe. R. Ayers, Commissioner Emily Biggs, and Commissioner David “Skip” Gurganus, County Manager James Bennett, Clerk to the Board Julia Rease, County Attorney Nate Peele, and Finance Officer Cindy Ange.

Chairman Ronnie Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Emily Biggs led the Pledge of Allegiance, and Chairman Ronnie Smith, provided the invocation. Chairman Smith extended a welcome to all in attendance as well as those viewing virtually.

**AGENDA APPROVAL**

Vice Chairman made a **Motion** to approve the Agenda as presented with a **Second** by Commissioner Ayers. Motion **Carried** unanimously.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS - NONE**

**CONSENT AGENDA**

**1. Minute Approval**

- Minutes – October 13, 2021 Regular
- Minutes – October 13, 2021 Closed Session
- Minutes – October 21, 2021 Closed Session

**2. Financial Report – October 2021**

**3. Tax Assessor – Tax Refund Request – October 2021**

**4. Tax Assessor – Tax Relief Orders – October 2021**

Year Levy	Lname	Fname	Reason	Value	Total
2020	Butterfield	Michele Lynn	Sold Vehicle	55,833	522.04
2021	Goddard	Judy D	Error in Landfill FE		182.00
2021	Mobley	Robert T. Jr.	Sold Vehicle	1,728	16.73
2021	Leary	William Henry Trustee		13,360	299.56
2021	Hardison	Clint		16,890	148.63
			<i>Total Real &amp; Personal Releases</i>		\$1,168.96
					0.00
			<i>Total VTS Refunds</i>		\$ 0.00
			<i>Total Tax Relief Orders</i>		\$1,168.96

**Tax Collector’s Report – October 2021**

<b>Category</b>	<b>21-Oct</b>	<b>October - 21 Y - T - D</b>
20	\$ 485,856.48	\$ 2,812,781.23
25	\$ 93,092.22	\$ 688,461.66
	<b>\$ 578,948.70</b>	<b>\$ 3,501,242.89</b>
30	\$ 165.00	\$ 366.41
	<b>\$ 579,113.70</b>	<b>\$ 3,501,609.30</b>
	<b>\$ 579,113.70</b>	<b>\$ 3,501,609.30</b>

**Board Appointments/Reappointments MCRWASA**

MCRWASA Board Director, Al Chesson, resigned from the board due to relocation. The Town of Williamston has appointed Mr. Eric Pearson to fulfill the term of Mr. Chesson. Mr. Eric Pearson if the Town of Williamston has agree to fulfill the current term for Mr. Chesson, which would end on 11/30/2022.

This item was **Accepted** and **Approved** in the Consent Agenda.

**Martin County Airport - Work Authorization #6 Admendment #3**

**New Road Name- “Big Pops Lane” Jamesville, NC**

For the purposes of this item, a road or roadway is "a public or private one-way or multiple-lane route that is used for ingress or egress or route of transportation between specific points and/or areas". Martin County approved an ordinance on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006 to better help the efforts of the E-911 emergency response team to serve our county citizens most effectively in an emergency situation. The Martin County Road Naming and Addressing Ordinance allows the Tax Assessor's Office to request an approval of a new road name when there are three (3) or more residences that use the same ingress/egress to their occupied dwelling.

Taxpayers, Stanley Lilley & Lisa Groover, are requesting a new road name to be assigned to the passageway that they own. There are 2 homes already on a farm parcel that is being developed down a dirt passageway that abuts the Manning Rd. As per the Martin County Road Naming and Addressing Ordinance, this passageway needs to be assigned an official name. Stanley & Lisa own 100% of the land for the passageway. Stanley & Lisa submitted a request of suggested names for the new road. Included are maps to visibly portray the area of interest and the approval of all the necessary officials, prior to submittal to the Board of Commissioners.

Tax Assessor Elisha Hardison recommends the new assigned road name to be “Big Pops Ln”. There is no other "Big Pops Ln" located or named in Martin County. The Board of Commissioners is was asked to approve the new name of the road as "Big Pops Ln, Jamesville NC 27846".

This item was **Accepted** and **Approved** in the Consent Agenda.

## **Transit SSP Manual Approval**

North Carolina refers to the network of coordinated public transportation programs as the Community Transportation Program (CTP). These entities, including Martin County Transit, provide public transportation to the general public and to clients of human services agencies.

To be eligible to receive Section 5311 funds, community transportation providers must fulfill several minimum CTP requirements, one being the annual adoption of the revised SSP Manual available from the North Carolina Department of Transportation – Integrated Mobility Division. Martin County Transit is required to keep such current policies in the SSP Manual Notebook in our MCT office. SSP stands for “System Safety Plan”.

The SSP is the definitive guide for Martin County Transit operational practices. The ten sections of our SSP Manual include:

- (1) Emergency Action Plan
- (2) Fire Prevention Plan
- (3) Preventive Maintenance Plan
- (4) Drug and Alcohol Testing Policy
- (5) Safety and Security Plan
- (6) Continuity of Operations Plan
- (7) Driver and Employee Selection
- (8) Driver and Employee Training Orientation
- (9) Safety Data Acquisition & Analysis Plan – Safety Awareness Program
- (10) Martin County Transit Operational Handbook

Each Martin County Transit employee has access to the complete hard copy of this SSP Manual Notebook in the Martin County Transit office. A hard copy of the revised SSP Manual (Sections 1 to 10) was filed in the County Clerk’s office for review. This updated SSP Manual will replace the previous SSP Manual.

This item was **Accepted** and **Approved** in the Consent Agenda.

**Clerk Report-** *included for informational purposes*

## **INTRODUCTION OF NEW EMPLOYEE(S)**

### *Water Department- Mr. Robbie Whitaker*

Water Systems Manager Ed Warren introduced his newest employee, Mr. Robbie Whitaker, of Robersonville NC. Water Systems Manager Warren stated that Mr. Whitaker served in the Air Force for 21 years doing many mechanical jobs such as maintaining the utilities. Mr. Whitaker was thanked for his service and choosing Martin County.

### *Veterans Services Officer – Mr. Thurman Savage*

County Manager U. James Bennett introduced Mr. Thurman Savage of Oak City, NC. Mr. Savage stated that he was previously working with the school system and is ready to begin helping the veterans of Martin County and surrounding areas.

Landfill- Mr. Wayne Peaks

Public Works Director Justin Harrison introduced his newest employee Mr. Wayne “Flash” Peaks who is a Martin County Resident. Public Works Director Harrison stated Mr. Peaks grew up on a farm and has been farming and in construction for over 30 years. It was reported by Public Works Director Harrison stated that Mr. Peaks has attained his pesticide license and Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) to name a few of many.

**PRESENTATION (S)**

**COVID 19 Update- MTW Health Director Wes Gray**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recently discovered coronavirus causes coronavirus disease COVID-19. COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. COVID-19 is now a pandemic affecting many countries globally. MTW District Health Director Wes Gray made an initial COVID-19 Coronavirus presentation to the Board of Commissioners on March 11, 2020. He has provided COVID-19 email updates since mid-March and provided an update at the May through September Board of Commissioners meetings, as well.

Martin Terrell Washington Health Director Wes Gray presented the COVID 19 Update stating that the total number for Covid cases in Martin County was 3778 including an additional 6 cases since November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021. MTW Health Director Wes Gray stated that there were 56 active cases in Martin County with 52% of the population receiving the first dose and 48% receiving the second dose of vaccine.

MTW Health Director Gray showed the Board and staff a new CDC Graphic Data Tracker that color codes the counties of North Carolina based on the number of cases recorded per week. The color blue represented a county with a low amount of cases, yellow represented a moderate case level, and orange represented a substantial level of cases and red representing a high level of cases. MTW Health Director showed the Board and staff that Martin County was color coded in orange, representing a substantial risk of Covid -19 cases. It was reported by MTW Health Director Wes Gray that in order to lessen the use of mask, Martin County would need to be color coded in blue. MTW Health Director Wes Gray was thanked for his presentation.

**Tobacco Awareness Month- Ms. Miranda Keele**

MTW Public Health Educator Miranda Heath informed the board of Tobacco Awareness Month and services provided by the MTW Health Department. MTW Health Educator Heath stated Tobacco education and cessation help is offered through MTW District Health Department. MTW is dedicated to promoting a tobacco-free lifestyle and reducing the number of teen and adult tobacco users, including e-cigarettes and other smokeless tobacco products. MTW is also working towards increasing tobacco-free policies across government campuses and public parks

MTW Health Educator Heath reported that there were more tobacco retailers near schools in low income areas than any other area. It was reported that there are certain groups within our community that are still smoking at higher rates. These are called health disparities and include race and ethnicity, education, poverty status, health insurance, disability, sexual orientation, and mental illness. Studies report that:

- Native Americans/Alaska Natives (21.9%) have shown a higher rate in tobacco usage compared to White Americans (16.6%)
- Individuals with GED's (34.1%) reportedly use more tobacco than those with graduate degrees (3.6%)
- Citizens living below poverty (26.1%) reportedly use more than those that live above the poverty status (13.9%).
- Citizens with Medicaid (27.8%) or are uninsured (27.4%) show higher percentages in tobacco use than those who are insured privately (11.1%)
- Citizens who have a disability (21%) use more tobacco than individuals who do not have a disability
- Individuals preferring Lesbian, Gay, and or Bisexual use tobacco more than those who do not identify as Lesbian/Gay/ and or Bisexual.
- Individuals who identify with having mental illness or mental illnesses have shown a higher rate of tobacco usage than those who do not identify having a mental illness or illnesses.

MTW Health Educator Heath reported that fifty years ago Dr. Luther Terry shocked the nation when he released the first Surgeon General's report that linked smoking to lung cancer and heart disease. In January, the 32nd Surgeon General's Report on smoking and health was released. In 2006, the scientific evidence showed that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. This data was instrumental in building support for smoke-free policies such as NC's Smoke-Free Restaurants and Bars Law.

Next, Health Educator Heath reported on E Cigarettes. E-cigarettes come in many shapes and sizes. Most have a battery, a heating element, and a place to hold a liquid. E-cigarettes produce an aerosol by heating a liquid that usually contains nicotine—the addictive drug in regular cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products—flavorings, and other chemicals that help to make the aerosol. Users inhale this aerosol into their lungs. Bystanders can also breathe in this aerosol when the user exhales into the air. MTW Health Educator Heath reported that E-cig aerosol is not harmless, smoking these cigarettes can harm brain development, and learning may be impacted as well as memory and attention. It was also reported that the E- Cigarettes can increase risk for future addiction to other drugs.

Lastly, MTW Health Educator Heath reported that the Community Preventative Services Tasks recommends Smoke –Free Policies to reduce in exposure to secondhand smoke, the prevalence of tobacco use, increase the number of tobacco users who quit; reduce the initiation of tobacco use among young people; reduce tobacco-related morbidity and mortality, including acute cardiovascular events; and reduce healthcare costs substantially. MTW Health Educator Heath stated that there was a proclamation for Tobacco Cessation and it was listed as a New Business Item for the Board to vote on later. MTW Health Educator Heath was thanked for her presentation.

### **Head Start Program- Dr. Landon Mason**

Dr. Landon Mason, Economic Improvement Council of Chowan, spoke to the Board and staff about the Head Start program in Martin County. Dr. Masons stated that Head Start is a federally funded comprehensive preschool developmental program that provides services to income eligible

children and their families. The Head Start Program operates in the context of the child's total environment: Classroom, Family, and Community. The program promotes school readiness but also health, nutrition, mental health, family services, and parent involvement. Head Start believes that each child is a unique individual. A child can benefit most from a comprehensive program, which involves both the family and community. As the family is the principle influence on a child's development, they must be a direct participant in the program. Thus the program serves the child not only through educational, health, nutrition, and mental health services, but also provides support and needed services for the total family. As the basic needs of the family are met, they are enabled to better nurture the development of its children.

Dr. Mason reported that MCAI Head Start Program has been operating in the Martin County area since 1965; Beaufort County area since 1977; and the Pitt County area since 1985. Dr. Mason reported the Head Start program served 160 children 3 years ago and has seen a decrease due to COVID 19. It was reported that the program has 90 children enrolled, with 78 children being from Martin County, serving children ages 1-5. Early Head start accepts children 1-3 years of age and Head Start accepts children 3-5 years of age. The Head Start Centers are open Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. with transportation provided to children ages 3 years old and older.

Lastly Dr. Mason reported that there were giveaways for families and children to pick up toys and necessities. The last "Big Pop Up" was on May 25, 2021 provided a contactless supply distribution of household goods, personal supplies, food items, educational materials and other needs. Dr. Mason reported that there will be an upcoming giveaway soon. Dr. Mason was thanked for his presentation by the Board.

#### **Cooperative Extension Update – Mr. Lance Grimes**

Mr. Lance Grimes was unable to attend the meeting due to unforeseen circumstances.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

##### **Emergency Management Services- Mr. Jody Griffin**

County Manager Bennett reported two meetings ago, Oak City Chief of EMS Ricky Cannon and Butch Beach made public comment regarding Oak City EMS needing help with additional workers. Manager Bennett also reported on the behalf of Emergency Management and Code Enforcement Director Jody Griffin regarding a letter of correspondence from Director Griffin that was included in the Board's agenda packets. Manager Bennett read the letter that stated, "*Martin is one of the last counties in NC where some form of County EMS is not in place and in order to support that mission to a level the State is requiring the anticipated budget would be approximately \$3.4 million, which I do not believe we should do*". *Our best option is to continue to support EMS through designated general fund tax monies. At this time based upon recent information, a minimum of a 2-2.5 cent property tax increase is needed to maintain their operation. The goal is to provide enough support for each agency to staff two personnel, 24/7 to accomplish this. If we do not look at this option, per NCGS, the County Commissioners will have no option but to enter in the EMS business.*" Manager Bennett stated during a presentation by Mr. Lilley and Mr. Canon, there was a discussion that Martin County may need 8 more personnel later on. Manager Bennett also referenced discussing \$40,000 for EMS personnel. Manger Bennett reported that \$40,000 times 8 personnel equals \$320,000. Manager Bennett stated that the Board approved \$100,000 to go to EMS, which would leave \$32,000 unaccounted for. Manager Bennett stated that he did not want to increase the fire tax and that there was another way to receive

the extra \$32,000 to fund 8 personnel in EMS. Manager Bennett stated that personnel will not be county employees, or receive county employee benefits such as health insurance, life insurance, retirement, colas or any other benefit received by county employees. Manager Bennett reported the personnel would be employed through the Fire or EMS departments and the \$32,000 would be an expense to look at in Budget Year 2022-2023. Manager Bennett stated that the various Fire Departments were interested in at least keeping a 1% fire tax, just in case they will need personnel as well. The shortage of workers was discussed as Manager Bennett stated that he received a call where an EMS department did not have the ability to respond to a call due to the lack of employees and another EMS department had to respond.

Chairman Smith and Commissioner Gurganus made comments about the importance of EMS as it is an essential service to the county citizens. Commissioner Gurganus asked what four EMS departments were in need of employees. Code Enforcement and Emergency Management Services Director Jody Griffin entered the meeting and stated that there was a heavy need in the rural EMS departments of Robersonville, Oak City, Hamilton, and Jamesville. It was reported by Director Griffin that Williamston's EMS department had issues with second call outs and a call volume of 2:1, which is the highest call volume in the county. It was asked if the monies given to the EMS departments from the county were going to be annual and if there was a possibility of the amount increasing. Director Griffin stated that there could be an increase to this annual payment, but it depended on what level is decided to encourage EMS through the county to go to. Director Griffin stated that the Fire Departments do have the ability to ask the board to increase fire taxes to a cap, but EMS does not have a dedicated means of funding through general statute as it is one of the things that falls on the Commissioners. Director Griffin stated that he would be able to make a budget presentation at the Budget Retreat in 2022 to further explain a mapped out budget plan.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Tobacco Awareness Month: A Proclamation**

MTW Health Educator Mrs. Miranda Heath reported on Tobacco Awareness Month and presented the Tobacco Cessation: A Proclamation as presented:

#### **TOBACCO AWARENESS MONTH A PROCLAMATION**

**WHEREAS**, tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in North Carolina and the United States;<sup>1</sup>

**WHEREAS**, in 1964 the United States first Surgeon General's report linked smoking to lung cancer and bronchitis;<sup>2</sup>

**WHEREAS**, in 2006 the United States Surgeon General provided scientific evidence that showed there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke;<sup>3</sup>

**WHEREAS**, in 2014 the United States Surgeon General provided evidence that smoking seriously damages nearly every part of the human body;<sup>4</sup>

**WHEREAS**, in 2016 the United States Surgeon General provided evidence that e-cigarette use among youth can cause long term harm to the developing brain and respiratory system. Additional risks include: mood disorders, the decrease of impulse control, and alters the brain to produce future addiction to other drugs;<sup>5</sup>

**WHEREAS**, according to the North Carolina 2019 Youth Tobacco Survey Results, e-cigarettes are the number one product used by youth since 2015. In addition, 90% of tobacco users start before the age of 18;<sup>6</sup>

**WHEREAS**, the Martin-Tyrrell-Washington District Health Department has provided education, spread awareness and offered intervention links for our youth population, and the use of tobacco and electronic cigarettes continues to present a challenge to the health and well-being of our youth population; and

**WHEREAS**, the Martin County Board of Commissioners wishes to support the Martin-Tyrrell-Washington District Health Department in its responsibility to promote the health of the public in Martin County.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, we, the Martin County Board of Commissioners, do hereby proclaim the Month of November, 2021 as Tobacco Awareness Month and call upon the people of Martin County to increase their awareness and understanding of the impact that tobacco use has on our citizens.

---

Chair, Martin County Board of Commissioners

---

Date

Commissioner Gurganus made a **Motion** to approve the Tobacco Awareness Month: A Proclamation and name November as Tobacco Awareness Month and **Second** by Commissioner Biggs. Motion was **Carried** unanimously.

### **Selection of Engineering Company**

County Manager Bennett reported on two companies that were being discussed as candidates for an engineering study in District 1 and District 2 for the USDA grant loan at the last Board meeting. The grant would provide \$30,000 per district and County Manager Bennett stated that the engineering study candidates were the Wooten Company and were Wooten and Withers Ravenelle. Manager Bennett stated The Wooten Company was being recommended as the engineering firm as they offered to complete the engineering study without charge to the county. The second reason the Wooten Company was recommended was due to the firm providing services for the county in the past years and having familiarity of the county. Manager Bennett reported that the company was ready to begin services if approved as the engineering firm for the engineering study.

**Motion** to approve the Wooten Company as the engineering firm for the USDA Grant Pool Engineering Study on District #1 and District # 2 made by Commissioner Biggs and **Seconded** by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. Motion **Carried** unanimously.

### **Retreat Discussion**

Manager Bennett discussed the plans to have the annual budget retreat on March 29 and March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at the Moratoc Building as well as potential speakers. Manager Bennett stated that the recommended speakers for the budget retreat were Chairman of the Catawba County Board of Commissioners and past president of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC), Kitty Barnes; David Baker Property Tax with NCACC, and Mr. Wendell Davis former County Manager for Durham County. Manager Bennett stated that Relationship Coach Dr. Elaine Stevens was also recommended as a speaker who could conduct personality test to determine how to work better with each other in the workplace. Manager Bennett reported that the speakers agreed to conduct the speeches without charge.

**Motion** to approve March 29<sup>th</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 as the Budget Retreat dates by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. and **Seconded** by Chairman Smith. Motion **Carried** (3-2). **Aye:** Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Bond Jr., and Commissioner Biggs. **Nay:** Commissioner Gurganus and Commissioner



Ayers. Commissioner Gurganus stated that the public wanted to be included in the Board meetings, but were not due to valid COVID reasons, therefore he could not agree for a Budget Retreat.

**CLOSED SESSION – NC G.S. § 143-318.11. (a)(3) – Client/Attorney Privilege, NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (4) – Contracts and Agreements, and NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (4) – Economic Development**

At 8:24 p.m., Commissioner Gurganus made a **Motion** to enter Closed Session for NC G.S. § 143-318.11. (a)(3) – Client/Attorney Privilege, NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (4) – Contracts and Agreements, and NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (4) – Economic Development, with a **Second** from Commissioner Biggs. The Board **Approved** the motion unanimously.

At 9:37p.m., Vice Chairman Bond Jr. made a **Motion** to go out of Closed Session NC G.S. § 143-318.11. (a)(3) – Client/Attorney Privilege, NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (4) – Contracts and Agreements, and NC G.S. § 143-318.11(a) (4) – Economic Development, with a **Second** from Commissioner Gurganus. The Board **Approved** the motion unanimously.

**OPEN SESSION**

**BOARD REPORTS/COMMISSIONERS’ COMMENTS- NONE**

*Manager’s Report*

Manager Bennett discussed the notification of resignation of the county attorney as well as upcoming holiday events: Thanksgiving Employee Appreciation Drive - through Luncheon, the Commissioner’s Christmas Luncheon, and an additional day off for all employees on December 23, 2021 as well as a Christmas Gift Book in place of the traditional Christmas Luncheon for employees.

Manager Bennett stated that the county attorney sent in notification of resignation and services would continue through June on as contractual basis until an attorney can be founded. Manager Bennett stated that Attorney Melvin Bowen was contacted to see if he was acceptable of assisting the county until an attorney is founded.

Next Manager Bennett discussed the Annual Christmas Luncheon for the Board and stated that the event unusually costs around \$600-\$800 and was held at the Hitchn’ Post in the first week of December. Manager Bennett asked if this is something the Board would like to have.

Commissioner Ayers stated that he disagreed due to county employees not having a luncheon this year.

Manager Bennett presented a Christmas Gift book for employees in place of the Annual Christmas Employee Luncheon as well as an additional day off on December 23, 2021. Manager Bennett reported that employees could pick items from the Christmas book as well as online items from a site attached to the book. Each employee would receive their own book with a letter of well wishes from the Board and department heads. Manager Bennett reported the cost for the Christmas books

would be derived from the monies for the traditional annual Christmas Employee Luncheon with \$1,000 difference.

Commissioner Gurganus suggested using the monies that would have gone towards a Christmas Luncheon for the County Commissioners to go towards the \$1,000 difference between the Christmas books and the Employee Christmas luncheon.

Manager Bennett reported that there would be a Thanksgiving Drive Through Employee Appreciation Luncheon that would be provided ion Styrofoam plates at no cost to the county.

**Motion** to approve the additional day off on December 23, 2021 by Commissioner Biggs with a **Second** by Vice Chairman Bond Jr. Motion **Carried** unanimously.

**Motion** to approve the proposal for the Christmas Gift Books by Commissioner Gurganus with a **Second** by Commissioner Ayers. Motion **Carried** unanimously.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business to discuss, at 9:50 pm, Commissioner Gurganus **Motioned** to adjourn and Commissioner Ayers **Seconded** the motion. The Board unanimously **Approved** the motion.

The next Regular Board Meeting for the Martin County Board of Commissioners has been scheduled for December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

---

Ronnie Smith, Chairman  
Martin County Board of Commissioners

---

Julia S. Rease  
Clerk to the Board