

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA )  
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COUNTY OF STOKES )  
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OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS  
STOKES COUNTY GOVERNMENT  
DANBURY, NORTH CAROLINA  
WEDNESDAY JANUARY 25, 2023

The Board of Commissioners of the County of Stokes, State of North Carolina, met for a Recessed Senior Work Session (recessed from the January 24, 2023 Senior Work Session recessed originally from the January 17<sup>th</sup> Senior Work Session) in the Commissioners' Chambers of the Ronald Wilson Reagan Memorial Building (Administration Building) located in Danbury, North Carolina on Wednesday January 25, 2023 at 10:00 am with the following members present:

Chairman Rick Morris  
Vice Chairman Brad Chandler  
Commissioner Sonya Cox  
Commissioner Ronnie Mendenhall (via phone)  
Commissioner Keith Wood

County Personnel in Attendance:  
County Manager Shannon Shaver  
Assistant County Manager/Clerk to the Board Amber Brown

Chairman Morris called the recessed meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

#### **Senior Work Sessions - Continuation**

##### **Register of Deeds**

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to Register of Deeds Brandon Hooker for his presentation.

Register of Deeds Hooker presented the following information: (presented Board members a detailed handout)

- Would like to thank the Board of County Commissioners for hosting these work sessions with department heads – feel this is a very good idea allowing department heads to provide the Board with information about their department
- Mission Statement

- It shall be the mission of the Stokes County Register of Deeds to serve as custodian of Stokes County land and vital records, and other records as needed. The Register of Deeds shall record, maintain, preserve, and provide access to said records in accordance with North Carolina General Statutes. The Stokes County Register of Deeds shall also provide excellent customer service and strive to exceed expectations.
- Functions
  - Go right along with the mission statement
  - Record, maintain, preserve, and provide access to all the land records in the County including but not limited to deeds, deeds of trust, powers of attorney, satisfactions, easements, right-of-way agreements, flats/surveys, contracts, notices of foreclosures, bankruptcies, various types of agreements, affidavits, anything that can affect real property excluding wills and estate records which are kept by the Clerk of Court
  - Record, maintain, preserve, and provide access to all birth/death/marriage records, assumed business name certificates along with indexing of these documents according to the standards set forth by the North Carolina Secretary of State's Office
  - Issue marriage licenses, swear in notaries from North Carolina, provide services to the general public, record and maintain military discharges, upload all notary oaths to the Secretary of State's Office daily, upload birth/death/marriage records to the North Carolina Office of Vital Records monthly, administer the new "Thank a Vet" Program, record/maintain certificates of grave removal, provide certified and general copies, and assist customers with certain land record searches, genealogy searches, etc.
  - Make daily deposits to Finance Department, provide GIS/Mapping with copies of our deeds for updates to the County Mapping System, provide the Board of Elections a quarterly death certificate list report to help them purge their voter records
  - Staff took over answering the county telephone operator extension last year
  - Wide range of duties performed in the Register of Deeds' Office

Commissioner Wood confirmed with Register of Deeds Hooker that there have been only two certificates of gravel removals during the last five (5) years. Register of Deeds Hooker noted that the department has no part of the process other than recording the document.

Register of Deeds Hooker continued:

- Budget Considerations:
  - Register of Deed is a revenue making department
  - Believe there has not been a year in which expenses exceeded revenues for the department – no general fund needed to operate the department
  - Ten percent of recording fees must be applied towards Preservation and Automation Fund per NC General Statutes
  - Grossed a little over \$800,000 last year with the State receiving part of our fees per NC General Statutes

- After remittance to the State, the department netted \$509,048 against a \$306,000 County expenditure budget – bring a lot more revenue than needed for expenditures for the department – one of the best revenue years
- Do not believe this year will be as lucrative as last year although we are still doing good – transactions have slightly decreased since the increase in the interest rates
- My first goals after taking office were to improve access where it could be improved upon which has been done and is an ongoing measure, add to services along with acquiring another position which was accomplished that allowed the department to add new services
- When the market went haywire, the department saw a 35% increase in transactions – additional position helped out tremendously which allows two staff members during the lunch hour
- The recent salary study did not treat staff the way I would have liked
- My next step in getting the department to where I want it – get employees' salaries where they need to be for the number of services they provide, their workload, to be more competitive for future recruitment – would like a closed session to further discuss this issue
- Believe that is the last piece of the foundation for getting the department to where it needs to be
- Training
  - NC School of Government at Chapel Hill provides a guidebook which is regularly updated that covers everything that the office does – provides excellent inhouse training for staff along with on-the-job training
  - Indexing of our records is the cornerstone of our office (varies document to document) and is usually the most important step in the training process
  - All our employees are crossed training
  - I have attended Basic School for Register of Deeds at the School of Government my first year in office – received my certification – other staff members can attend this training after being on the job for at least one year
  - There is also an advance class that staff can attend
  - North Carolina Association of Register of Deeds offers annual workshops
  - Send staff to Forsyth Tech for notary training – would be beneficial if it could be held at the Meadows location
  - Have considered taking a real property law class that Forsyth Tech offers, believe it would help the department
- Turnover
  - Office has experienced low turnover
  - With Register of Deeds being an elected office – staff can change when a new Register of Deeds is elected
  - When elected, there were two existing staff members, one retired within a couple of years and one transferred to another department
  - Current staff members have been in the department for three and a half years
- Short Term Goals
  - Indexing Project for records prior to 1993 is currently going on and should be imported into the department's system by probably March or April

- Online searches for documents prior to 1993 are somewhat difficult to search for
- This Indexing Project for records prior to 1993 will improve access to those records (back to 1979) (will make title searches much easier)
- The funding for this project is coming from the Automation Preservation Fund as previously discussed (a three-year payment plan)
- May look at future back indexing projects beyond 1979 in-house if possible
- Everything 1979 and forward will be fully indexed giving the general public better access
- Property Notification System has been in place for approximately three (3) years
  - Short term goal for this system is to get more awareness out to the general public about this new service
  - Letters are mailed out to grantees whenever a deed is recorded to notify them of this free service
  - Approximately 80-90 counties across the state have some form of this system
- "Thank a Vet" Program
  - Getting a lot of Veterans to come in but not getting as many businesses to come in as I thought we would
  - Believe times are tough for businesses right now -- just need to continue to get the word out about the program
  - Stokes News will be running another article very soon about the new program
- Will not be doing any new projects this Spring – expecting our first child
- Will probably start new projects this summer – want to jump into genealogy
  - Would like to subscribe to ancestry.com, fold3.com, and newspapers.com to help people with their genealogy search – have a computer that would be available for people to use
  - Would love to help people with their genealogy search
  - Fold3.com is historical military record site, newspaper.com contains historical newspaper articles
  - Plans are to work on this project this summer
  - Want to host a workshop on starting your family tree sometime in the future
- Disaster Recovery/Power Outage/Cyber Attack Plan
  - Have had some colleagues that unfortunately experienced a cyber attack on their land records vendor which affected people not only in NC but across the country (occurred right after Christmas)
  - Know there is at least a half of a dozen or so counties that are still not up and running with their software
  - Basically, you would have to go back to the old method of stamps, handwritten books, etc.
  - This is a very hot topic with our Association this year (what to do if your system goes down)

- Currently working on that topic now with the Association putting together some guidelines
- Plan on putting together a policy incase that were to ever occur here
- With a power outage, our servers are only on backup for about two hours
- With a disaster recovery (flooding, fire, etc.) – all land records are completely backed up on the cloud on servers at our vendors location in Greensboro and servers here
- Redundance is built into keeping our records safe at least the digital copies
- All primary records are backed up on digital copies except some of the old marriage records – very few which are in the process of being digitized
- The fault is not fireproof – that is something that could possibly be looked into
- Long Term Goals
  - Preservation is an ongoing goal – getting records preserved and keeping them from further deterioration – primary records, by general statutes, are kept indefinitely
    - Have a lot of records that are really old – earliest marriage records go back to 1830s, some deeds going back to 1780s
    - Have just gotten a quote for preservation of some of old marriage records for 2023-24 – doing a couple of years each fiscal year - expensive work but very meticulous work – funding comes from the Automation Preservation Fund
    - Hope to do more each year once the back indexing is done which is more of a priority
    - Still have some of the old, old survey maps that are not online – hope to start that project sometime in the near future – funding will be used from the Automation Preservation Fund
    - Average spending approximately \$20,000 each year from the Automation Preservation Fund
  - Cemetery Mapping
    - Have been talking with Tax Administrator Richard Brim regarding the number of cemeteries in Stokes County that need to be mapped
    - Know there are probably a lot of volunteers that would help with this project
    - Have been talking with other Register of Deeds across the state who have done this
    - Would be beneficial to the GIS/Mapping System
    - Will continue to work on this project
- Top Three Issues
  - Personnel and salaries – believe there is a need for further discussion regarding this topic
  - Expanding and strengthening services
  - Getting word about the new “Thank a Vet” Program out in County – hopefully involving more businesses
  - Getting awareness out about the Property Notification System
  - Getting Genealogy Assistance Program up and running

- Working with GIS/Mapping to develop a listing of all cemeteries across the County
  - Top issues – improving services and expanding services when possible
- Training
  - Believe training incentives would attract employees and also help employee morale
- Don't have any questions for the Board
- Would just like to say, it is an honor to serve as the County's Register of Deeds
- Have worked very hard to build a customer service department since taking office
- Service is our department's main goal

Chairman Morris opened the floor for discussion/questions/comments.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Confirmed with Register of Deeds Hooker that he provides information about the department's services to Rotary/Ruritan Groups, senior centers, civic groups, etc. along with articles in the local newspaper and putting announcements on Facebook
- Doing a great job
- Continue the good work

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Confirmed with Register of Deeds Hooker that 80-90% of the fees are paid electronically, do not take in a lot of cash, office is balanced at the end of the day, and daily deposits are made to the Finance Department
- Appreciate the regular briefings to the Board
- Keep up the good work
- When you make your budget request, make sure your requests are detailed – will help the manager and the Board

Commissioner Wood commented:

- Doing a great job
- Appreciate the cross training in your department, very big fan of cross training – great asset for the department
- Confirmed with Register of Deeds Hooker that his department does not have any immediate software needs – department's software and hardware are provided by their vendor – Logan Systems

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Very good report
- Impress with the changes you have made since you took office
- Be glad to discuss salaries at a later date
- Glad to see you moving forward to develop the cemetery program, believe that will be beneficial to the citizens
- Appreciate you implementing the "Thank a Vet" Program
- Know that you care about protecting and preserving Stokes County records

Chairman Morris commented:

- Appreciate you, as an elected official, participating in the Senior Work Session along with the Sheriff who is also participating in the work session
- Confirmed with Register of Deeds Hooker that he is considering grade changes for his employees

Register of Deeds Hooker responded:

- Want to compensate employees for the work they are doing – our department employees' job duties are similar to the clerk's office

Chairman Morris continued:

- Confirmed with Register of Deeds Hooker that he requests department employees have their notary due to the nature of the job – a good service to the public
- Glad you are working with Forsyth Tech
- Questioned Register of Deeds Hooker about Logan Systems – department software vendor

Register of Deeds Hooker responded:

- Department has been with Logan Systems for over thirty days
- Logan Systems, which is a full-service vendor, is one of the top vendors in the industry and across the State
- Contract is renewed every three years – up for renewal next year
- Level of service has not changed since I took office but will be closely looking at the renewal next year
- Do a lot of networking with other Register of Deeds regarding the pros and cons of vendors

Chairman Morris continued:

- Libraries are offering the ancestry.com free – might want to look at partnering with them – like the idea of doing the genealogy – will be well perceived by the citizens

With no further discussion, Chairman Morris expressed the Board's appreciation for his participation.

Chairman Morris recessed the recessed Senior Work Session for a five (5) minute break.

Chairman Morris called the recessed Senior Work Session back to order.

### **Senior Services**

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to Senior Services Director Vicki East for her presentation.

Senior Services Program Director Vicki East presented the following: (presented Board members a detailed handout)

- Little bit of history about myself:
  - Currently the Program Director for Stokes County Senior Services
  - Have worked for Stokes County as of March 31<sup>st</sup> this year – 31 years
  - Have worked my entire career in the Senior Services Department in many different roles – have been the director for the past ten years
  - Stokes County native and care about the senior population
- Senior Services Department
  - Small department with eight employees that serve as an advocate for the senior population
  - Fifty volunteers - volunteers base has declined since 2020 due to COVID
  - Lost a lot of our good volunteer base – very hard building that volunteer base back up
- Senior Services Mission:
  - It is the mission of Senior Services to provide comprehensive and timely services to the seniors of Stokes County to ensure they remain independent for as long as possible and to improve or maintain their quality of life
  - We want to keep our seniors at home as long as we possibly can and the services, we provide enable them to remain at home
- Senior Services provides the following:
  - Medical/general transportation
  - Congregate meals
  - Home delivered meals
  - Insurance counseling
  - Legal vouchers – partner with YVEDDI to serve Stokes County for that particular service
  - Heat Relief Program – providing fans to those who qualify
  - Farmer's Market Voucher Program – used at local Farmer's Market for produce items
  - Operate Walnut Cove Senior Center – in the process of applying for the fourth state recertification (Certified Center of Excellence)
    - Being a Certified Center of Excellence allows the Center to apply for state general purpose grant – this year's amount was \$14,535 (required local match of 25%)
    - Funding is used to help provide instructors who teach approximately twenty classes at the Center (fifteen classes/activities are required to maintain the Center of Excellence status)
    - Try to provide classes that are wanted by the senior population
    - Our Senior Center Coordinator, Reba Dodson, is going above and beyond reaching out into the communities to offer exercise classes as part of our "Senior Center Without Walls" - partnering with churches, civic groups, etc. – being sponsored by both King and Walnut Cove Senior Centers
    - Hope to bring different programs to those communities – trying to reach people who can't come to our centers due to transportation issues
    - Have two great centers - King and Walnut Cove
    - Trying to offer as many free classes as possible – but do have to charge for some classes

- Thoughts for the upcoming budget
  - Foresee a request for increased county funding for our meal program along with transportation
  - Currently using YVEDDI and Gentle Care transportation providers
    - Believe there will be an increase this year due to fuel increases
    - Block Grant funding has decreased somewhat over the years
    - To date, have already exhausted Block Grant funding for transportation
    - Have citizens that can drive locally, but need transportation to appointments such as Winston Salem/Clemson – they don't drive in larger cities
    - Seems appointments are being booked in the Clemson area a lot lately
    - Explained how the YVEDDI Transportation works for clients – transporting to a particular location and then picking them back up – sometimes wait times are long for the clients due to YVEDDI having issues hiring drivers and picking up other clients at different locations
    - YVEDDI also provides transportation for dialysis patients
    - Gentle Care is the other vendor used by the County – a smaller company who normally waits for the client at the appointment
  - Currently using Providence who is a division of Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest NC for our meal program
    - In the process of reviewing our annual survey regarding the meal programs – allows the citizens an opportunity to let us know what they like or don't like about the meal program
    - Can't always please everyone because people just like different things – some people like some things while others do not
    - Try to make clients understand the meals are not going to be like what you cooked
    - Last year's survey provided positive comments about the food and the services
    - Some clients have told me that the meal they receive from the meal program is the only meal they eat each day
    - Meal program is needed in Stokes County
- Training and succession planning
  - Our department is cross trained
  - Being a small department, we can't deliver the services without employees being cross trained
  - This really became a factor when COVID hit
  - For example, if the Walnut Cove Senior Center Coordinator is out, we cover the Center; if the site manager at the nutrition site is out, we cover that site; if a volunteer who delivers meals is out, we cover that route
  - Meal routes: (we are backup to all these routes)
    - Three in Francisco
    - Three in King
    - Three in Walnut Cove
    - Two in Danbury
    - Special frozen meal route in King

- Most of our training for volunteers is on site – travels with other employees/volunteers
- Personnel issues
  - Have a great staff – works very well together
  - The entire staff wants to provide the best possible service to the senior population
  - Have had some turnover – when asked why they are leaving – it is usually due to an increase in salary which I can respect
  - May have to request a part time employee for the Walnut Cove Senior Center due to the Winston Salem Urban League employee who worked part time recently retired
  - Trying to help the Urban League find someone who meets the League's requirements – not an easy task
- Forsyth Tech Campus
  - As director, I am mandated to have a ServSafe Class every five years – this keeps the site managers from having to take the class
  - It would be wonderful if Forsyth Tech could provide that class
  - Want to partner with Forsyth Tech to provide more senior, friendly classes similar to what the Senior Centers provide – years ago worked with Forsyth Tech to offer quilting, crocheting, art-based classes, photography, etc.
  - Believe they lost their funding and had to start charging big fees for those classes which eventually eliminated the classes – seniors can't afford those kinds of fees for classes
  - Walnut Cove Senior Center coordinator is working with Forsyth Tech to provide some sensitivity training to the early college students – a requirement of the Certificate of Excellence – this is a perfect way to enlighten the younger population about the senior population and their aging issues
- Short Term Goals
  - Recruitment of volunteers – need to build our volunteer base back
- Long Term Goals
  - Build the morale of the department
  - Would like to come up with inventive ways to show the staff how much they are appreciated
  - Always tell my employees everyday how much they are appreciated
- Things that keep a department head up at night
  - Having enough staff to provide the services
  - Having enough funding each year to provide those services to the citizens
  - How to keep my staff happy and motivated
- Part time/compensatory time
  - Have 4 part time employees who work under 1,000 hours
  - Try to eliminate employees from accruing compensatory time unless absolutely necessary – if they accrue compensatory time, try to get them to use it as soon as possible
  - Want my employees to be able to spend time with their families
- Don't have any questions for the Board but would like to extend an invitation to the Board to stop by the department anytime – could schedule anyone a time to ride with a volunteer on a meal route

- Have a great department that I feel provides an awesome service for our County

Chairman Morris opened the floor for discussion/questions/comments.

Chairman Morris commented:

- Agree with Director East that her department does provide an awesome service to County residents
- Great presentation

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Glad to learn more about the department
- Confirmed Providence who provides the meal program is located in Winston
- Appreciate your dedication to help the seniors in Stokes County
- Have sent several individuals to the Senior Centers to learn more about the programs being offered
- Great service

Commissioner Wood commented:

- Big fan of the services provided by your department
- Involved in the caretakers' program along with programs at my church for seniors
- Believe there are a lot of elderly people in our County that have a lot of pride – they don't believe in taking handouts
- My church has a meal on wheels program once a month – feed those who are not able to get out – started out with sixteen that has grown to forty-seven
- Think we need to get more churches involved – elderly people want company
- Last statistic I saw was that the population in Stokes County over 50 is 45% and growing
- Anything I can do to help, please let me know

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Questioned if there was anything done during the year to show appreciation to the volunteers – for their dedication and service

Director East responded:

- Third week of April is National Volunteer Week – we try to provide programs for our volunteers
- In years past, have held an event at the Arts Council and invited all the volunteers for an activity
- First Thursday in December, the Walnut Cove Senior Center hosts a volunteer breakfast to recognize their volunteers
- Try hold events throughout the year to show them how much they are appreciated
- Have found that a lot of volunteers don't attend the events because they don't do it for recognition, they do it to help out and be involved in their community
- Have one volunteer that moved to NC from California to be near her mother, the first day she came to NC, her mother had her delivering meals, she has been a volunteer for 26 years – dedicated volunteer who volunteers five days a week

- Have a lot of volunteers that been with us for several years – sad to say that they are also aging
- Did have a countywide annual reception years ago that eventually phased out – not sure why

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Possibly look at starting back that countywide event
- Would like to know when the volunteer recognitions are being held, would love to attend
- Try to think out of the box things that will make the volunteers feel special and show how much they are appreciated
- We definitely need to make sure our volunteers feel appreciated
- Thank you and your department for being there for the seniors

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Director East and her department does a great job
- Have visited the centers and saw some of the programs being offered
- Know it has been hard during the past two years maintaining volunteers
- Your volunteers do a great job
- Feel for those seniors having to travel to various places for medical treatment – does make for a very long day
- Appreciate the services you and your department provide

Chairman Morris recessed the recessed Senior Work Session for a five-minute break.

Chairman Morris called the recessed Senior Work Session back to order.

Chairman Morris apologized for a short glitch in the recording which should be working correctly now.

#### **Sheriff's Department/Jail**

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to Sheriff Joey Lemons for his presentation. (Chief Deputy Eric Cone was also in attendance for the presentation)

Sheriff Lemons presented the following information.

- Feel this is a very good idea for the Board to learn more about the departments before the budget process
- Feel free to ask questions or make comments during my presentation
- Appreciate the opportunity to participate
- Main thing that I want to focus on with the upcoming budget is manpower – that is our biggest issue right now
- Things that keep a department head up at night:
  - Number one is officer safety along with the safety of our citizens
  - Internally, it is both retention and recruitment
  - I know Commissioner Cox has family in law enforcement and Vice Chairman Chandler served in law enforcement that can relate

- Since taking office, the department has made some really heavy investments in our equipment – a lot of that was done without using county funding
- Duties done by the Sheriff's Department:
  - Answer calls of service
    - In 2022, our department:
      - Processed 2,495 civil papers
      - Served over 3,000 criminal processes
- Staffing
  - County is divided into six patrol zones
  - There are six deputies assigned to each shift – one deputy per zone
  - There is a sergeant who serves as the shift supervisor and is also entrusted to serve an area and answer calls just like the deputies on that shift
  - There is a corporal who is directly under the sergeant but also has a zone to serve and answer calls just like the other deputies on that shift
  - Would like to see in the future that sergeant position not having to serve an assigned area and answer calls
  - When a deputy needs assistance, the sergeant and/or corporal have to leave their assigned zone to assist, this leaves an area not covered

Vice Chairman Chandler questioned what is the average priority one response time.

Sheriff Lemons responded he did not have that information available at this time but would get with Communications to see if that information is available from the system.

Sheriff Lemons continued:

- Believe having the sergeant being strictly in a supervisory role, not juggling those duties with covering their assigned area, would cut down on response times and reduce County liability

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- Understand where you are coming from, since becoming a commissioner, have found several departments who have department heads doing day to day operations taking away time from their responsibilities of looking at the big picture for that department

Sheriff Lemons continued:

- Believe this would also help when an officer assigned to a particular area is out on leave or injury
- Wanted to see what the Board's thoughts were regarding hiring employees and then sending them to Basic Law Enforcement Training – have spoken to County Manager Shaver and Assistant County Manager Brown a while back about this concept
- We don't have the positions to do that now
- Hope this would provide incentives for individuals to come to Stokes County – know other agencies are doing this in order to get employees

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- Used to doing that practice of hiring employees and then sending to Law Enforcement Training (called over hires)
- This allows the department to have trained employees ready when there is retirement, resignation, or dismissal
- Willing to look at this – doesn't really work well when you have a lot of vacancies

Chairman Morris commented:

- You have to be creative to stay staffed these days
- Believe this Board would be open to hear any creative ideas

Sheriff Lemons continued:

- Would be very interested in exploring Vice Chairman Chandler's suggestion of over hires
- Have recently implemented our body cameras so the upcoming budget will have those needed recurring costs
- Have currently been looking at in-car internet that the department does not have at this time – do not have air cards either
- Deputies must now use hot spots located within the County to submit reports
- We have ordered in-car cameras (have not received yet) – in-car internet would allow submission of reports timely and downloading from body cameras simultaneously
- State is pushing paperless everything currently using several different platforms
- Believe we need to look at in-car internet

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- Believe we need to look at getting the department air cards now

Sheriff Lemons turned the floor over to Chief Deputy Cone to further explain the need for in-car internet.

Chief Deputy Cone commented:

- Unfortunately, with the lack of the in-car internet and the records management system we currently have does not have the modules set up necessarily to do it in a mobile format
- Our system we are currently using is probably outdated
- The officers are opening a Microsoft word document, creating the instant report, then going to find an internet source to email the document to their supervisor who then reviews the document
- Once the supervisor approves the document, it is then emailed to a county email address that is tagged to a photocopier that prints out a paper report in the office at which point the records management person has to key in the information into the records management system

Vice Chairman Chandler stated this must be fixed immediately – do not have a choice.

Chairman Morris agreed this must be fixed.

Sheriff Lemons continued:

- Have met with our current vendor (Spillman) to see what can be done along with also looking at other vendors
- Spillman is scheduled to come back within the next couple of weeks to demo an upgrade to our current system
- Upgraded software would help streamline the office allowing records management personnel to be able to do other things – cut down on redundancy

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Reiterated this is not a choice and must be fixed

Chairman Morris commented:

- With the County moving forward to increase fiber and wireless capacity across the County, hopefully this will help
- This Board is especially interested in increasing technology across the County – especially in Public Safety
- Would also like to have a discussion regarding the Spillman System sometime later

Sheriff Lemons turned the floor over to Chief Deputy Cone to speak about the Jail.

Chief Deputy Cone commented:

- Certification is regulated by the NC Administrative Codes – they determine how an officer meets that certification requirement
- Effective July 1, 2024, no person can be hired for the road or in the Jail prior to certification and are not allowed to do any function that requires certification
- Currently we go through the application process along with the psychological testing for new hires for the Jail
- The new hire usually works in the Jail from three to six months before sending them to detention training
- This allows the new hire to see what the job is really like and to decide if this is what they want to do as a career
- A lot of people do not really realize what the job entails
- The three to six months give them the opportunity to see what they are getting into before the County invests a lot of funding in their training
- Once it is determined this is really what the employee wants to do, the County sends them to Detention Officer Certification course through the local community college which is usually a five-to-six-week course
- As of July 1, 2024, all employees must be certified before entering the Jail
- Have questioned if an individual could do a shadowing program to see what it is really like, the answer was no
- Only thing a person can do without being certified is a custodian, someone who does not interact with an inmate
- It has also been mentioned that the certification school may be increasing to more than five to six weeks

- If you have several employees quit and the certification course has just started, it will be six more weeks before anyone can even consider another course – then it takes several weeks to get it arranged and then six weeks of class
- Attendees of the course must successfully pass a state exam once they have completed the course
- The concern is trying to cover the liability and the staff inside the facility
- This will have to be included in the upcoming budget – have one year left before the new mandate takes effect – July 1, 2024
- Sheriffs across the state are struggling with this new mandate

Commissioner Wood questioned who was behind this new mandate and why.

Sheriff Lemons responded:

- This is coming from Senate Bill 300 – Criminal Justice Reform – this was a specific addition that Sheriff Standards pushed

Chairman Morris confirmed with Sheriff Lemons that the whole issue is forcing departments to hire someone who is already certified.

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Recent incidents have caused a big uproar with the National Training Standards
- Sheriff's Association became involved

Chief Deputy Cone continued:

- When you allow an individual to work three to six months to determine if this job is for them, you are not investing additional funding to train them
- We also allow individuals, once their background check is completed, to sit in the control room and observe the surroundings – that is done before the three to six months on the job training – some leave before the three to six months on the job training ever starts
- This is definitely growing to be a challenge after July 1, 2024

Chairman Morris confirmed with Sheriff Lemons that currently the detention training is not available at the Forsyth Tech Campus located in Meadows.

Chief Deputy Cone continued:

- Forsyth County Sheriff Bobby Kimbrough is considering running his own certification course

Sheriff Lemons commented:

- Currently Surry Community and Forsyth Tech in Winston Salem offer a detention training program
- Rockingham Community College does not offer a training program

Chief Deputy Cone noted that Surry Community College and Forsyth Tech work together to stagger their programs so both are not at the same time.

Vice Chairman Chandler confirmed with Chief Deputy Cone that the age requirement to work in the Jail is now twenty – just recently dropped from twenty-one.

Vice Chairman Chandler confirmed with Sheriff Lemons that occasionally if there were no patrol jobs open, an individual has been hired to work in the Jail until a patrol job becomes available – an individual currently can work in the Jail one year before having to be certified.

Sheriff Lemons responded:

- With this new mandate, a patrol officer who has Basic Law Enforcement Training Certification can't work in the Jail because they would not be detention certified
- This eliminates using patrol officers in emergency situations

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Today's trend in the surrounding areas is recruiting for the Jail staff just as much as a top priority is for recruiting road officers
- That equates to starting salaries for detention officers being the same as road officers

Sheriff Lemons responded:

- That was the way it was for years and years, the new salary study changed that when it was implemented
- Forsyth County just changed their salaries to be the same

Vice Chairman Chandler noted that Guilford County has done it and believes that Rockingham County is getting ready to do it.

Sheriff Lemons responded:

- In the past, the argument was that it was two different functions
- Definitely agree, but right now the current market plays into that - have more vacancies in the Jail than the sworn side

Chief Deputy Cone continued:

- This goes back to housing additional inmates, you can only house additional inmates if you have adequate staffing to provide the security needed for the safety of the inmates and staff
- If the staffing continues to reduce, then we have no choice but to reduce the population to reduce the liability to the County
- The additional income being brought into the County is not as much right now due to staffing issues – employees with COVID, employees on Family Medical Leave, plus current vacancies
- We have dedicated employees in the Jail who are willing to work on their days off

Chairman Morris added that long term, the County needs to optimize that revenue from housing additional inmates.

Sheriff Lemons noted that the bed space available right now is not being utilized due to not enough staffing.

Vice Chairman Chandler confirmed with Sheriff Lemons that the average daily number of inmates being housed is around 100 depending on whether Superior Court is going on with our maximum capacity being 156.

Chairman Morris questioned the possibility of housing federal inmates.

Sheriff Lemons noted that he preferred to house additional state inmates which is much simpler.

Commissioner Cox confirmed with Sheriff Lemons adequate staffing is the big concern at the Jail right now – eliminating the opportunity to house additional inmates for extra income.

Vice Chairman Chandler questioned how the department currently recruits for detention/road officers.

Chief Deputy Cone responded:

- Currently, the department has an employee who works the applications trying to get applicants in as soon as possible
- Jobs are posted on Indeed which has been a good resource
- Jobs are posted on the department's Facebook page as well as the County's website
- One thing that hinders the application process is the physiological testing that is mandated – there is about a two-week turn around due to every agency having to do this
- The challenge is getting them here along with trying to keep them here
- Current staff is tired and needs some relief from working overtime
- One problem is surrounding counties are trying to fill their vacancies too
- One problem with hiring people from outside the County is that once trained, the department will lose that employee to the county where the employee lives – closer to work for the employee especially with the job duties being basically the same

Sheriff Lemons responded:

- Biggest issue right now is that all surrounding departments have vacancies and are trying to fill their vacancies

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- You are going to have to market the Stokes County Sheriff's Department and Detention Center
- One thing that you have going for your department is that the public supports your department – that is not necessarily true in other places
- It is your department, but from my experience, you have got to market the department

Chairman Morris responded:

- Think you need to include in your marketing campaign things like good equipment

Sheriff Lemons responded:

- Appreciate the Board responding so favorably with my recent request to increase salaries along with investing in good equipment – have new vests for employees, best equipped

vehicles we have ever had, technology is not actually where we want it, but it is improving

Sheriff Lemons continued:

- Did want to highlight some of the things the department has done during the past two years (since becoming Sheriff) to try to lower the burden on the County using other funding that could have been used for other things within the law:
  - Spent approximately \$50,000 for new vests for deputies – new design to help reduce back issues
  - Have purchased new pistols, rifles, and shot guns
  - Have invested funds in drug operational equipment
  - Have purchased six new alco-sensors, new flashlights
  - Used funding to promote Dare Program – worthwhile program
- Still having to use overtime in the Jail but not for the patrol officers
- Expressed concerns with the current A&E System for logging in time
  - Administrative staff is spending approximately twenty hours a month basically to redundantly do the same thing three times – employee has to punch in, supervisor then has to punch it in and then ultimately the senior staff punches it in – also a paper time sheet is completed

Chairman Morris noted that the A&E System as a whole is an inadequate system across the County.

Commissioner Cox confirmed with Sheriff Lemons that employees would appreciate being paid every two weeks instead of every twenty-eight days.

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Want to look at every two weeks when deciding about new software for Finance and Human Resources

Chairman Morris, Commissioner Wood, and Vice Chairman Chandler all agreed with Commissioner Cox that getting paid every twenty-eight days needs to be looked at with the purchase of new software.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Good presentation from Sheriff Lemons
- Know that the new mandate for Jail hires is going to be a big issue for the department and the County
- Like the comments from other Board members regarding the need to look at the payroll schedule with the upcoming software purchase – benefit for employees
- Every time you listen to the news, you hear about the increasing amount of Fentanyl coming across the border, wondering if your department has seen an increase in Fentanyl use in Stokes County

Sheriff Joey Lemons responded:

- Have definitely seen an increase in the use of Fentanyl – Fentanyl being mixed with other drugs (cocaine/meth)
- Our special investigation division works tirelessly – just recently purchased a new canine who is doing excellent work

Commissioner Mendenhall continued:

- As far as manpower, be sure to include the rationale for any new request in the upcoming budget

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Would like to see a dedicated IT person for public safety that could be shared with Sheriff's Office, Jail, Communications, Fire Marshal's Office, and EMS
- Feel those departments need one person who is dedicated solely to public safety and their system
- Know we are short-handed in IT
- Would like to know briefly how it works when an inmate comes in that needs to detox

Chief Deputy Cone responded:

- With the recent Jail expansion, we were able to rededicate some of the housing units that existed into a quarantine unit
- Have medical staffing at the Jail twelve hours per day
- When an inmate enters the Jail, they are immediately evaluated to determine their medical needs – something that plays into that screening is the inmate being honest with staff
- Inmates are placed in the quarantine unit
- Detox protocols are administered if needed and staffing will monitor as directed by medical staff until the inmate is cleared and then standards are followed per state requirements transitioning that inmate into a regular housing unit based on their charges

Commissioner Cox confirmed that currently the staff does not administer Medical Assistance Treatment for Addiction (MAT).

Commissioner Cox noted that with the Health Department hiring a physician that is MAT certified, is that something in the future that should be considered.

Sheriff Lemons responded that his department along with other agencies across the state are evaluating that option – pros and cons with doing the treatment.

Commissioner Cox continued:

- Statistics show when inmates are released, they almost immediately overdose a lot of time
- Believe MAT could help those situations
- That leads me to the opioid settlement money and how could it help in your department
- Have personally witnessed an individual having drug issues – out of control and scared for their safety and others

- How do we help when they have not broken any laws

Sheriff Lemons responded:

- Regardless of whether we start MAT, the department has looked at utilizing a position as a release coordinator for inmates who are being released from the Jail
- This position would try to work with those scheduled to be released – do you have a place to go, do you have a job to go back to, provide organizations that could help the inmate once released, etc.

Chairman Morris suggested bringing Forsyth Tech to the table with considering this new position.

Sheriff Lemons continued:

- Also want to make the Board and staff aware that the medical costs are increasing in the Jail due to addiction – will see an increase in the upcoming budget
- Our medical contract with Southern Health Partners has a cap regarding medical costs
- As of July 2022, the County has been billed approximately \$85,000, but due to contract negotiations, we have only been invoiced for \$27,800 – our cap is \$35,000 – with only six months into the current fiscal year

Chief Deputy Cone commented:

- Jail works with LifeBrite, Novant, and Baptist for medical and Mabe/Mabe for dentistry
- LifeBrite handles a lot of our immediate needs
- EMS also works with the department when a transport is needed

Chairman Morris confirmed with Sheriff Lemons that the department is still doing the Pre-trial Release Program when it is appropriate.

Sheriff Lemons noted that the Pre-trial Release Program has been a great program over the years.

Sheriff Lemons expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to discuss matters with the Board.

Vice Chairman Chandler expressed his appreciation to Sheriff Lemons, an elected official, for participating in the Senior Work Session and that the information discussed today will provide this Board with a starting point in the upcoming budget process.

Commissioner Mendenhall informed the Board that he had to leave the Senior Work Session.

### **Board of Elections**

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to Board of Elections Director Jason Perry for his presentation. Chairman Morris express the Board's appreciation to the Board of Elections members who were in attendance for the work session.

Director Perry presented the following information: (Director Perry provided the Board with a detailed handout)

- Mission and Responsibilities

- The Mission of the Stokes County Board of Elections is committed to securing the fundamental right to vote by administering free and fair elections for the citizens of Stokes County in accordance with state and federal election laws.
- The Board is responsible for the conduct of all elections in Stokes County including special, municipals, county, state, and federal elections, voter registration, maintenance of current voter records, the core components of the office, and many other duties associated with the elections administration process are performed as well.
- My own personal mission is to try to conduct an election without getting my name in the paper or be on the six o'clock news
- Organization of the County Board of Elections
  - Five-member Board who are registered voters in the County
  - Four members are appointed by the State Board of Elections
    - Two Democrats and two Republicans
      - The state chairs of the Republican and Democratic parties recommend three registered voters to the State Board
  - The fifth member, who serves as the Chair, is appointed by the governor
  - Members here today:
    - Mike Pell – Chair
    - Jack Johnson - Member
    - David Burge - Secretary
  - It is a bipartisan Board
  - County's political parties submit recommendations to the state chairs
  - It is a long and winding process, in most instances, whoever the County's political parties recommend are ultimately selected and appointed by the State Board of Elections
  - Board of Elections employs a director and staff
  - Currently, have a two-person office with a full-time director and deputy director who manages the office and conducts elections
- Board of Elections' duties:
  - A number of tasks that afforded by law
    - Appointing precinct officials
    - Setting precinct lines
    - Establishing early voting sites and polling places
    - Conducting hearings
    - Review and oversee other aspects of the elections administration
- County department that also follow the decisions made by the governing body
- North Carolina State Board of Elections
  - NC has a centralized top-down approach to elections
  - A lot of the policies the Elections Department follows begins with state law, administrative code, federal law, and the policies of the State Board of Elections
  - Uniformity is a main focus - regardless of where you live – you should have the same voting experience
  - Five-member bipartisan board
  - Serve a four-year term that is appointed by the governor
- Have 31,763 registered voters in Stokes County

- Eighteen election day polling places along with early voting
- Voters currently still use the hand marked paper ballots
- Have approximately 115 poll workers on election day
- Have approximately 25 early voting workers
- Have a couple of part time staff who work as needed
- Elections Administration is regarded as critical infrastructure by Cyber Security and Infrastructure Security Agency (an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security)
- Provided Board members with a breakdown of voter turnout percentages during past elections with presidential elections always having the biggest turnout
- Upcoming Budget Issues
  - Elections' budgets tend to be cyclical
  - The 2023-2024 budget will have funding request to cover a municipal election and the first primary along with the possibility of a second primary
  - Municipal elections are administered by the Elections Department costing around \$8,000 which is reimbursed by the municipalities
  - Normally do not have big requests except for voting machines with the last purchase being in 2019
  - Will be discussing with my Board members at our next meeting the optical scan tabulators and the machines that are designed for individuals with disabilities – will be deciding if the replacement for these machines should be a short- or a long-term goal
- Training
  - Majority of the department's training comes from the State Board of Elections – offers webinars every couple of weeks
  - Also receive overviews of where things are at from the executive director
  - Staff and Board members attend training conferences sponsored by the State Board of Elections – occur usually before an election
  - Two-day conferences – great networking
  - Also have district meetings
  - I have completed the Certified Elections Administrator course
- Succession Planning
  - Staff consists of director and deputy director
  - Deputy Director started in October 2022 and had to hit the ground running
  - Still learning their job duties
  - Always a challenge to retain poll workers
  - Been lucky over the years to have good poll workers

Vice Chairman Chandler confirmed with Director Perry that poll workers hourly rate ranges from \$10 to \$12 per hour with district judges receiving a bonus for picking up the day before and returning supplies after the polls close.

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- If there is a shortage of poll workers, may have to look at increasing the hourly rate

Chairman Morris confirmed with Director Perry that poll workers did not have to have a criminal background check prior to working at the polls.

Director Perry continued:

- Goals and Priorities
  - Cross training with only two staff members -- with the previous deputy director being here for over ten years, I basically refreshed myself regarding those job duties when the position became vacant in 2022
  - Have gone back and documented procedures performed by the deputy director
  - If the deputy director is out for an extended period, new documentation with my assistance should allow someone to step in during the absence
  - Once the new deputy director is comfortable with their job duties, will start cross training that person regarding the director's duties
  - New voting machines for individuals with disabilities as previously mentioned
- What keeps the director awake at night – an election
  - Biggest priority now is the transition to the new facility
- Will be meeting next week with the architect – very optimistic about the new facility
- The new location should be a really good office space for the Elections Department with ample storage

County Manager Shaver noted that the former bank facility already has a security system that should be very beneficial for the department along with a lot of opportunities within the building to make a very good office space (ample parking and facility is ADA Compliance)

Director Perry continued:

- Department of Public Safety has a division that performs assessments regarding Elections Department facilities - have contacted the division who is willing to do an assessment

Elections Board Member Burge confirmed County Manager Shaver that the former bank building's security system is only an alarm system and does not have cameras that should be considered in the renovations.

Commissioner Wood expressed comments from the libraries who were at a recent meeting and noted that they enjoy early voting at their locations.

Director Perry continued:

- Would be happy to answer any questions

Chairman Morris opened the floor for any further discussion/questions/comments.

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Appreciate your presentation especially with some of your board members attending
- Excited about the upcoming project for the new renovated facility
- Appreciate the work done by the department especially support you provide to the citizens and candidates

- Elections Departments have come under more scrutiny as of late and that is one thing that I have never felt that we had to worry about in our County – the security of our elections or any type of fraud
- Great job

Commissioner Wood had no further comments.

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Like everywhere else in the County, there is a problem with limited staffing
- Do appreciate, especially seeing it from a candidate's side, making my life a lot calmer
- There is no doubt here in Stokes County with how the office operations are being run – very professional – reassured the results coming in are accurate
- Thank you for your dedication

Elections Board Member Burge commented:

- This Board, Director Perry, and staff make sure procedures especially during elections are done correctly such as the absentee votes

Elections Board Member Johnson commented:

- Would like to piggyback on Member Burge's comments regarding the Elections Board making sure that all procedures are done fair and correctly
- It is definitely bipartisan, not one party doing it all, it is fair and equal
- Feel like the opportunity in Stokes County is minimal at best – don't see it in Stokes County

Chairman Morris commented:

- Appreciate the support and help the office provides candidates with their reporting and responsiveness when data is requested
- As far as the new voting machines for individuals with disabilities, will support getting the new machines as soon as possible – believe the current machines are very heavy for poll workers to handle and are not up to date
- Maybe look at a few each year
- Confirmed with Director Perry that early voting is regulated by the state (changed in 2018)

Director Cox had to exit the Senior Work Session for a Department of Social Services Board meeting.

Chairman Morris continued:

- My personal opinion is the longer the period for early voting is the better opportunity it is for possible fraud

Director Perry continued:

- Explained the process of the procedure that takes place when ballots are returned to the office after each early voting day which prevents someone from being able to cast another vote

Chairman Morris requested information regarding how records are purged regarding those who die or move out of the County.

Director Perry responded:

- That is a local function
- Receive reports from the Department of Health and Human Services and Register of Deeds that contains names of those who are deceased
- Have provided a removal form to surrounding funeral homes that can be provided to the family that can be completed and return to the office to remove the voter
- Our software system will pick up someone who has moved out of Stokes County and registered somewhere else in North Carolina
- State of Boards provides information if the person has moved out of North Carolina and registered elsewhere
- Have a list maintenance software program that lists voters who have not voted for a period of time, card is mailed to the voter, if it is not returned, the voter becomes inactive
- Nothing is perfect, but there are means to remove voters who are no longer in Stokes County or deceased

Chairman Morris confirmed with County Manager Shaver that the vault in the former bank building was removed before the County purchased the facility and the facility did not have a permanent vault.

Chairman Morris concluded:

- Believe staff and Board of Elections are doing everything you can to maintain election integrity, but I think every county in this country has people in there that are trying to cheat the system if they can figure out a way to do it
- Anything that we can fund for your department where you could test election integrity, I would always be in favor of supporting those efforts
- I know you are aware of those things going on in other parts of the country – for example, departments that can't count their votes until 2-3 weeks after an election
- Expressed the Board's appreciation for detailed information provided by Director Perry and to the Board of Elections Members who attended the session today

Chairman Morris commented:

- Want to express the Board's appreciation to all the department heads/elected officials who have participated so far in the Senior Work Sessions for their preparedness and providing the information needed by this Board – will be a great help for this Board as we go forward

Board of Elections Member Burge commented:

- Would like to keep the communication open between the Board of Elections and the Board of County Commissioners – if there are ever concerns or questions – don't hesitate to ask – keep the lines of communication open

Chairman Morris stated the Board of Elections is always welcomed at a regular meeting or a joint meeting if necessary.

**ADJOURNMENT**

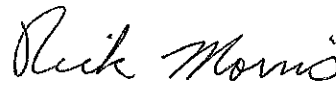
With no further business to come before the Board, Chairman Morris entertained a motion to recess the recessed Senior Work Session until Tuesday, January 31, 2023 at 9:00 am.

Vice Chairman Chandler moved to recess the Senior Work Session until Tuesday, January 31, 2023 at 9:00 am. Commissioner Wood seconded and the motion passed (3-0) with Commissioner Cox and Commissioner Mendenhall exiting the Senior Work Session earlier.



**Amber Brown**

**Clerk to the Board**



**Rick Morris**

**Chairman**