

Chairman Inman noted that speaking would be limited to three minutes.

The following spoke during the Public Hearing:

Clifford Hall

1305 Creasey Road

Lawsonville, NC

Re: **Fire Tax Increase**

Mr. Hall presented the following comments:

- Here on behalf of the Stokes County Fire Commission
- Budget Requests for the FY 2016-17 were \$2,546,769
- After budget cuts were finalized, \$1,955,000
- Had to cut into our protective gear which is something in my 12 years serving on the Commission has never been cut
- Insurance on the fire departments is \$239,740
- Existing note payments are \$603,072
- There is no substantial debt loss until 2034/35 when a \$77,000 note payment will be paid off
- A new fire engine is approximately \$400,000
- A new brush truck is approximately \$70,000
- A new rescue truck/ambulance is approximately \$200,000
- New turnout gear is approximately \$2,700 to \$3,000 per set
- New air packs with two bottles are approximately \$7,300
- All this equipment is necessary to operate a fire department
- All gear must be replaced every 5 years according to fire department standards
- Most trucks or other rolling equipment needs to be replaced every 20 to 25 years
- With 12 departments receiving funds from the fire tax fund, expenses add up
- With a decline in volunteerism, there had to be something done to make sure the calls were answered for the citizens of our county
- With a decrease in the fire ratings, homeowners' insurance premiums increase
- With funding being placed in the proposed budget for part time staff for all the departments along with turnout gear and mandatory communication equipment, it has led to a shortfall in the available funding
- Because of unavailable funding, the Fire Commission is asking for the full one cent increase in fire tax levies
- At the present time, there is only \$665 in the Fire Service District Fund Balance
- If there is an emergency in any of the departments and that department does not have available funding, the department will not be able to fulfill their contract with the County
- If a half cent is denied this year, it is imperative that it be included in next year's fiscal year budget (FY 2017-18) as personnel and other services will have to be eliminated due to the anticipated debt load increase of \$74,000

Time was called.

Jonathan Sutphin

181 Bosen Way

Westfield, NC

Re: **Fire Tax Increase**

Mr. Sutphin presented the following comments:

- Currently the Chief of the Westfield Volunteer Fire Department
- I am here tonight to speak on why it is a must for the fire and rescue services to have an increase on their fire tax
- For example, our fire department has seen a decline in volunteers and an increase in call volume
- Westfield Volunteer Fire Department is in the beginning stages of developing a daytime paid staff program
- Through a carefully planned budget and the proposed fire tax increase, we will be able to provide the citizens a guaranteed timely response during the hours of 6:00 am to 6:00 pm
- In 2015, 68% of the calls (259 out of the 380 calls) that we responded to were between 6:00 am and 6:00 pm
- During this time period, 84% of our current volunteer staff is out of the area due to work
- The paid staff program would supplement the remaining volunteers during this timeframe
- This program will not be possible without the additional funding through Stokes County
- Another example of why it is very important to receive this fire tax increase is because of equipment the state and the county require for the safety of our responders
- For example, the county has switched over to the new 800 Viper Radio System
- This equipment, that is required by the county, is very expensive
- One Viper radio cost approximately \$4,000
- Our department can't afford to have these radios in each of our trucks due to the cost, budget cuts, and cuts by the Stokes Fire Commission over the past years
- This means that we are responding to calls with these trucks that don't have adequate communication with Stokes County and any other fire department at that time
- This can put us in very difficult situations when responding to emergency calls
- This has also been proven to cause issues on the fire scene
- It puts our safety second instead of first
- Please consider what we have put together

Randall Patterson

2595 Mountainview Church Road

King, NC

Re: **Fire Tax Increase**

Mr. Patterson presented the following comments:

- Appreciate the time you allow for citizens to come to speak
- Don't have any prepared notes, been at this long enough and been through enough of these over the years, I know the road
- Looking back on that history, thank you so much for your support over the many years for the fire services and rescue personnel in our County
- These folks are our front line, many are here tonight

- Those folks provide those needed services at a moment's notice 24/7, never lacking to provide those services
- Definitely want to support them to make sure they have everything they need to serve the citizens in this county plus to protect, most importantly, themselves
- We have heard from the first couple of speakers regarding the lack of volunteerism
- We don't have men and women knocking down the doors of the fire departments to join
- We wish that was different, but that is not the case
- Call volume continues to increase every year
- Currently on the Board of Directors at Sauratown Volunteer Fire Department and watch that call volume continue to increase year after year
- The demand for services is not going to decrease
- Don't think anyone can argue that fact
- Going to continue to need funding in order to continue to provide services for our citizens
- All the departments have a Board of Directors that carefully look over the budgets with firemen who spend many hours putting these budgets together
- Believe all the departments do a tremendous job being as frugal and thrifty as they can be with what they are faced with
- The Board of Directors of each department is well ingrained in the community
- Don't think there is any question that we are all trying to do the best we can do with the funding being provided by the County
- We do definitely, as I understand, need the increase in the fire tax to be able to continue to provide the great services that the men and women of the fire departments and rescue squads provide daily for this county

Dwayne Young

1387 Hart Road

Lawsonville, NC

Re: **EMS, Schools, Hospital**

Mr. Young presented the following comments:

- First, I would like to thank you for the support that you just provided to the hospital for the continued operation in the interim while they go through the bankruptcy
- Full support, in concept, of you maintaining that relationship and that service to Stokes County because healthcare in our area is a must
- It has to be sustained one way or the other and you have done well over the last several years helping that happen
- Encourage you to continue to do so
- Stand in support of the manager's budget message concerning the EMS Division and his proposal for staffing, for incentives, for the equipment, and for the help they need as does every EMS System across the nation
- Believe his message included the sentence "these are not wants, these are needs"
- I encourage you to adhere to what that message sends to you
- This is not a fluff budget if I look at it correctly myself
- Heard every word that Manager Morris said and every dollar he proposed at the May 23rd meeting

- Anything outside the support of the current EMS System right now is of no benefit
- Maybe future, but as of today, you need to fund the high quality EMS System that you already have
- With the hospital in the state of flux it is, there is no reason whatsoever now to consider trying to change the way EMS services are being provided because they very well may be your healthcare system in Stokes County if the hospital does not come through with what they need
- I would also like to stand in support of funding our education system in the Stokes County School System
- I have a son who is finishing up the third grade this year and I watched him have to create his own math book this year before he could ever began the process of learning what the math book was going to include
- There are many funding needs for resources within our school system to attract not only the teachers and teacher assistants but good quality educators all the way around
- Our students deserve the needed funding
- Our students deserve to be given the tools and resources they need
- The numbers that will be presented to you not only by the manager for the school system itself, but for you to support whatever funding that they simply ask for
- Don't think there has ever been a time when county agencies and departments are having to really do a whole lot more with a whole lot less
- For you to ask them to do so at this point, I am not sure they can sustain the quality products that they all are asking to be given to the citizens if you decrease their funding
- Simply stand in support of what Manager Morris recommended in his budget message

Time was called.

David Willard

907 Fowler Road

Walnut Cove, NC

Re: **Fire Tax Increase**

Mr. Willard presented the following comments:

- Fire Chief of Walnut Cove Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad, Inc.
- Come before this Board to ask for your support of Stokes County and for all the fire departments that serve Stokes County to fund the request for a one-cent fire tax increase (7 cents to 8 cents)
- To fund that request, it will only require ten dollars from homeowners that own a \$100,000 home
- In 2011, Walnut Cove Volunteer Fire Department was placed on probation from the NC Department of Insurance for insufficient response to calls
- At that time, Walnut Cove could not provide 4 firefighters and a fire engine for all its fire responses
- It all came to a lack of daytime personnel
- It is not unheard of with what you have already heard tonight
- The days of the shopkeeper closing the store or the farmer leaving the field to run a call is pretty much over

- Bosses do not let employees leave to run a call
- Farmers now have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet
- In May of 2012, Walnut Cove hired its first paid fire fighters
- With budgeting we were able to fund two fire fighters from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (Monday-Friday)
- From August 2012 to August 2013, we were able to come off probation and significantly lower our insurance rate saving the average homeowner between \$200 and \$300 a year
- Commercial property owners saved even more
- Based on just 500 structures paying average insurance rates, it equates to approximately \$150,000 back into the economy
- As an economic incentive tool, you can now promote lower insurance rates to attract homeowners and new businesses to our district
- Think of our fire and rescue service as part of the overall infrastructure of the county and use it to support the growth of the overall economy
- With a strong infrastructure, comes greater opportunity for growth
- The paid program at Walnut Cove Volunteer Fire Department was a major influence on our rate reduction
- The station, the reports, the training, the equipment, the fire prevention, and the call response were being maintained with much needed consistency
- The added benefit we had was more volunteerism
- More people were coming to the station and hanging out with the guys
- We built a team atmosphere and we were all in it together
- So for all these fire departments represented here tonight and to lower their insurance rating, what do they need?
 - They need funding to purchase equipment that is quality tested and maintained
 - They need staffing that is trained, dedicated, and available
 - They need a communication system that is reliable and efficient
 - They need water, a strong, automatic mutual aid system that can sufficiently provide the water including tanker task force and standard operating procedures for hauling that water
 - They need a prevention program that is viable and measurable throughout the county
- I am asking you to give these guys and us the support that we need to continue to grow your infrastructure, to continue to be a beacon to the county and help us make Stokes County better

Thomas Mabe
 1254 Duncan Road
 Walnut Cove, NC
 Re: **Fire Tax Increase**

Mr. Mabe presented the following comments:

- Appreciate being allowed to speak tonight
- I am the Assistant Fire Chief for South Stokes Volunteer Fire Department
- Been in the fire department over 11 years
- Want to ask for the one-cent fire tax increase in order to keep our paid program going
- Volunteers are on the way out

- Can't find volunteers anymore
- Budgets get tighter each year
- With volunteers on the way out, will have to start funding more paid staff
- We need all the help we can get
- We also need funding to keep equipment maintained
- Our first truck out is a 1991 Mack, almost as old as I am
- We have put in for a new pumper with a \$400,000 cap
- A \$400,000 pumper is not the top of the line
- We want to continue to provide the best service we possibly can
- Thank you for your support and I request you consider the one-cent fire tax increase

Sonya Cox
 5645 HWY 66S
 King, NC
 Re: **Schools**

Ms. Cox presented the following comments:

- We are here tonight because of our concern over the recommended cuts to our budget that are outlined in the county manager's recommended budget
- We feel these cuts that are recommended are so deep that they could dramatically alter the delivery of educational services to our students and impact our ability to retain quality employees
- As you know, we have depleted our fund balance over the course of the last 2 budget cycles to balance our budgets
- You requested us to use the remainder of our fund balance this year; we only had \$312,000 to allocate for this year's budget
- This request already has cuts of over 16 teaching positions, eliminates 3 media assistant positions, and 1 assistant principal position
- It once again for the third year calculates the 4% supplement on the pay that our employees received for the 2013-14 school year which is a travesty
- We have already reduced our fuel requests
- We have adjusted our request to reflect the closing of a school
- The formula that was used to calculate this cut from current expense makes no sense
- You just can't allocate funds per ADM or on a per pupil basis like the state does
- The state has to find a way to equitably distribute their money among 115 LEAs
- So the only fair way for them to do that is per pupil
- It is nonsense for a county to do that
- A drop in the ADM does not change the fact that we still have to operate 19 school campuses
- Losing a few students at each school does not translate into huge cuts and teaching positions
- We are only asking you to fund 5 local teaching positions in this budget, compared to the 2011-12 budget where you funded 26.4 local teaching positions
- Mr. Morris, in your budget message, you stated that competitive salaries are a problem for the county so much so that you are recommending to spend \$45,000 for a salary study

- Obviously, there is a problem with the county salaries and they are probably much too low and we understand that issue as well
- The most critical emerging issue you said was that Stokes County Government is a non-competitive level of base salaries which directly impacts the operational stability of the county
- The same can be said for the school system
- You seemingly have no trouble asking the county's largest employer to cut by 10% some of our lowest paid clerical positions and to reduce or eliminate the 4% supplement that has been frozen for far too long, this is egregious
- We have taken numerous cuts from the state level to the tune of over \$2 million in recent years
- As you can see in our budget request, charter schools are impacting our budget negatively
- There is pending legislation right now that could take even more funding for charter schools
- Our hospitalization and benefits continue to rise which are things that we have no control over
- We just wonder where in the world do you cut an additional \$982,357 from this local budget
- Do we take our employees dental insurance when the state yearly cuts their benefits and increases their cost of insurance?
- Do you want us to close more schools?
- We sure hope not
- Do you cut or reduce the 4% supplement at a time when your county manager's budget message is telling you that paying a competitive salary is the biggest issue facing our county
- Do appreciate the funding for the roof at Chestnut Grove and the capital budget recommendation
- We really do feel we can accomplish great things with the cooperative spirit that we have and we don't want to see it diminish

Pat Messick
 147 Deerfield Drive
 King, NC
 Re: **Schools**

Ms. Messick presented the following comments:

- I am Vice Chairman of the Stokes County Board of Education
- I would like to thank the Board of Commissioners for the funding for the Chestnut Grove Middle School Roof Project
- I want to speak tonight in support of funding the total current expense budget proposed to the Board of Commissioners from the Board of Education
- In reviewing the budget line, item by item, you will see decreases have already been made in several areas even though there is an increase in the total budget request
- Some of the increases result from mandates not controlled by the Board of Education; such as legislative increases for salaries, retirement, hospitalization, charter schools, and school nutrition
- The increase for the Resource Officers results from a decrease in the state at-risk funding

- \$237,038 is a new request for matching funds for the Golden LEAF Technology Matching Grant to implement the “One on One Initiative” for students and devices for all high school teachers for two high schools – South Stokes and West Stokes High Schools
- The school system received this grant for North Stokes High School during the 2015-16 school year and was able to fund the matching without requesting additional funding from the county commissioners by using federal and state dollars
- These dollars are not available for the 2016-17 match request
- I do want to say that this is estimated at 1,427 students for South Stokes and West Stokes
- The ADM for the school system is projected to decrease next school year which results in a decrease of state and federal funding
- The school system is making adjustments for these decreases by cuts in positions, months of employment, and program cuts
- The current expense budget is an operating budget and should not be figured on an amount per pupil
- The Board of Education is appropriating fund balance to help with 2016-17 budget request
- We have been appropriating fund balance since 2012 and are now at a point that we are below our auditor’s recommendations
- It is extremely important for the students attending all of our 19 schools that the County Commissioners fund our entire current expense budget
- Thank you for your time and commitment to all the citizens in Stokes County

Wayne Duggins
 5929 Woodfield Drive
 Kernersville, NC
 Re: **Schools**

Mr. Duggins presented the following comments:

- Appreciate being allowed tonight to speak on behalf of South Stokes High School and Stokes County Schools
- I think we can all agree that the world in which we live is much different today than it was when we all attended school
- Textbooks, worksheets, and or similar resources typically used in the classroom have become a thing of the past
- Our teachers are no longer the “sage on the stage” dispensing information while students sit and get it
- It has been years since we have adopted new textbooks in this state which has required our teachers to find resources on their own to teach our new and ever changing standards
- This shift has been positive because it has forced our teachers to change and to no longer rely solely on one resource for information and student practice
- They have discovered the limitless classroom supplements and resources
- They have arrived at instructional strategies, have wealth in engaging activities, and the power of professional networking and collaboration
- For the past 2 years, my staff has been preparing for our digital conversion
- They are excited and ready to implement blended learning in their classrooms

- Our teachers have traveled to workshops on their own to develop professional development to showcase what they have learned, experimented with apps that give student mastery and embrace our new direction
- Just like students, my teachers need motivation
- Right now, even though it is the end of the school year, they are looking forward to next year and are talking daily about what they are planning to create
- To say my teachers will be disappointed if we do not get student chrome books or the instructional technology facilitator will be an understatement
- For our students, it is not just a laptop, this is an opportunity
- We all know that there are many inequities in life for our students
- The Golden LEAF Grant along with our matching funds will help us level the playing field for all of our students
- In my opinion, technology just like education, is the great equalizer
- It opens up a window for them to this world and allows them to be exposed to a wealth of information
- With their new digital tool, our students will be able to communicate and collaborate with their teachers, one another, and the outside world
- These devices will also assist in fostering critical thinking and creativity which we call the 4 Cs
- I believe it is a moral imperative that we provide our students with these devices
- So in closing, please remember that our students are not just competing with the students here in Stokes County; they are competing with students across the state and this country
- I believe we owe it to them to invest in their future
- You all have the ability to vote “yes” to funding our digital shift and assist us in putting students first
- Appreciate all you do for Stokes County and for Stokes County Schools

Steven Roberson

302 W King Street

King, NC

Re: **Fire Tax Increase**

Mr. Roberson presented the following comments:

- The King Fire Department is requesting consideration of a one-cent fire tax increase for additional staffing due to a decrease in volunteers and for equipment needs
- Since November 2009 to current, the King Fire Department has given out 48 volunteer applications
- Of those 48 applications, 40 have never been returned
- Currently, we have 18 volunteers
- Of those 18 volunteers, only 5 meet the department’s minimum call response, 100 calls per year, of the 2300 calls that the department responded to
- The 4 personnel on duty is the only guaranteed response
- Most incidents that we respond to require a minimum of 4 personnel
- Cardiac arrest incidents are a great example

- Studies have proven that adequate personnel on cardiac arrest calls increase the chance of patient survival tremendously
- The need for this is based around a team focused approach with each individual having a designated role
- One role not filled requires another person to do more taking away from vital patient care
- The same holds true for motor vehicle accidents
- The fire department's role in motor vehicle accidents is comprised of fire suppression, rescue, patient care, and hazardous materials
- Four fire fighters can't handle this adequately
- A combination fire department, which King Fire Department is labeled, is a transitional fire department
- The transitional timeframe is solely based on activities of the volunteer firemen
- If volunteerism remains active and meets the needs of the community then additional career staffing is not needed
- When volunteerism does not meet the needs of the community then additional career staffing will be needed
- We are saving money for our citizens
- In 2015, the Department of Insurance approved the King Fire District to have a greater than 85% fire hydrant coverage
- That project, which was fully funded by the City of King and had no direct impact on city residents, but had a 100% impact on our county residents
- The project reduced the insurance premium for homeowners within our 5-mile insurance district an annual savings of \$200 to \$300
- The King Fire Department's request of a one-cent fire tax increase would be an average of \$15 for a \$150,000 home
- Additionally, we provide Advance Life Support Medical Care, a service that no other fire department provides in Stokes County
- This service provides advanced life support to our citizens which is an extreme benefit due to the overall increase in Stokes County EMS call volume
- We also provide smoke alarms and infant car seat installation for any citizen
- Perhaps, the saddest example that I can give you regarding the state of volunteerism is in our Little League Program
- We have to beg people to coach our own kids; we can't find volunteers to help out on the ball field
- The effect of the fire department is the same
- People do not have the time to volunteer especially for a high risk profession such as the fire service
- Examples above assist in outlining our current situation at the fire department
- Volunteering has dwindled to the point that we can't provide safe and proper service for current staffing methods
- We can no longer rely on past practices of augmenting our full time staff of volunteers to manage manpower
- My request in this year's budget for 2 additional fire fighters will allow us to increase our staffing to 5 a day
- Appreciate what you do and request you support the one-cent fire tax

Time was called

Dennis Long

1188 Groundhog Trail

Pilot Mountain, NC

Re: **Fire Tax Increase**

Mr. Long presented the following comments:

- Speaking on behalf of Double Creek Volunteer Fire Department
- Support the Fire Commission and the manager's recommendation for a one-cent fire tax increase
- Looking at our budget this year, I think we need it
- We requested approximately \$233,300 and received only \$159,008
- One of the cuts was a set of tires for our second engine
- We requested enough funding for 6 tires, but only received funding for 3 tires
- It is like that throughout the budget
- Don't have the actual budget with me tonight
- Was asked by the Board at the last minute to speak tonight
- Back in 2009 while I was Chief, we were planning on replacing the 1991 F450 Brush Truck
 - Has had a couple of transmissions replaced
 - Has had 3 axles replaced
 - Had had the rear end replaced
 - Has had numerous clutches
 - Has had numerous alternators
 - Fire pump has been rebuilt at least twice
 - The Brush Truck is 25 years old and has not been replaced
- All departments have similar issues
- Support the one-cent fire tax increase
- Would also like for the Board to reconsider Double Creek's budget

Greg Collins

3188 Horseshoe Road

Westfield, NC

Re: **EMS**

Mr. Collins presented the following comments:

- Reading a letter on behalf of Dr. Darrell Nelson, Stokes County EMS Medical Director

Honorable Commissioners,

I regret not being able to stand before you tonight to articulate my concerns for our EMS service, as I am currently on duty in the emergency department. Over the past few months we have encountered many problems with staffing. In general there is a great shortage of qualified paramedics in North Carolina.

Several reasons are noted as cause of this shortage. First, overall salary for Paramedics lags behind all other health care professionals. For example, in Stokes County the starting salary for a public health nurse is \$45,258 yearly and have 150 hour work period, whereas a paramedic's starting salary is \$34,253 a year and work a 218 hour work period.

As a physician and former Registered Nurse, I absolutely value nurses. My comparison serves only as an example, and in no way is intended to negate their importance. Our paramedics are performing complex assessments and procedures well beyond the public health nurse's role, yet they are compensated much less.

This salary difference also varies considerably between our bordering counties. Other services have paramedics working less hours for more salary, making recruiting extremely difficult. Area hospitals also see the enormous value paramedics can bring and are now employing paramedics full time in emergency departments creating even more competition.

I know there have been some questions about solo-medics versus non-solo medics. As medical director it is my legal responsibility to ensure paramedics are qualified and capable to deliver medical care. Paramedic training is no different than medical or nursing training. A medical student does not graduate medical school able to perform surgery; they need a residency program for that training. A Registered Nurse does not graduate a nursing program able to function independently in the Intensive Care Unit. They need a period of on-the-job training, more education, and practical application before being able to function independently. Paramedics need additional training, and a period of orientation in order to be effective and safe.

I would like to comment on a potential cost-saving avenue which has been suggested – PRIVATIZATION. I am a board certified emergency physician, and I am 1 of less than 500 physicians board certified in Emergency Medical Services in the United States. In my expert medical opinion, privatization of the EMS system will absolutely decrease the quality and scope of care.

Privatization can work in some parts of the country, mainly large metropolitan areas. I feel this will not work in rural areas. Privatization will come with a company expecting to make a profit. In order to generate that profit, medical services provided will not measure up to the caliber of care that we now provide. The few private companies in NC providing EMS services do so with large subsidies provided by county government. So, in effect, the taxpayer subsidizes the **profit** of a private company.

As a Stokes County native, I take my responsibility as medical director very seriously and work diligently to ensure citizens of this county receive the best pre-hospital medical care available. Our paramedics perform complex assessments and procedures to decrease morbidity and mortality.

This brings me to my final point. Stokes County EMS is essentially the county's main provider of care for the acutely ill and injured. While the medical infrastructure in the county is at a period of great unknown, Stokes County EMS is an absolute emergency life net for the citizens of this county.

I have some strategies I believe may save money and maintain our current level of service and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss all those options.

Living great distances from a major medical center has health implications, especially when dealing with critical injury or illness. The people who most need a robust EMS system live in rural America.

Thank you for your time and your support of our important service and may God bless each of you, and the great County of Stokes.

Respectfully submitted,
Darrell Nelson
Medical Director, Stokes County EMS

EMS Director Collins presented a copy of the letter to each Board member.

David Durham
102 Bradberry Court
King, NC
Re: **Schools**

Mr. Durham presented the following comments:

- I am principal at Chestnut Grove Middle School
- Wanted to come tonight to provide input on a couple of issues that could pertain to the county budget this year
- First of all, want to say “thank you” to the county commissioners for funding to replace the roof on the older portion of Chestnut Grove Middle School
- This has been a desperate need for some time
- I am glad this was able to be funded
- With any luck, hopefully, we will get to it in time before there are any structural issues to save funding
- Secondly, wanted to speak to you regarding local funded personnel positions to cover the need that the state budget does not cover, specifically, at Chestnut Grove which is the second largest school in the county
- We currently have 2 assistant principal positions
- We are endanger of losing a position for next year with the same amount duties due to state cuts
- It will be difficult to maintain the same supervision of a school with 1 less person
- Please consider helping the school system out with their budget request which would include using local funding to cover the costs of positions that the state is unable to fund
- It would be greatly appreciated, specifically helping me to keep my assistant principal if possible
- Wish you luck as you have to make these tough decisions

Stephen Jessup
6621 NC 89 W
Westfield, NC
Re: **Fire Service Tax**

Mr. Jessup presented the following comments:

- I am here really to support the tax increase for the fire services along with the increase needed to keep our EMS operating
- No one in this room and probably no one in the whole county, especially you, wants a tax increase
- It is kind of coming to the place that if we are going to get services and improve our services, we are going to have to pay for it in order to see improvements
- We see that in the fire department, EMS and see it also with the school system
- When you go on a call, you are wanting to see EMS get there, quick as they can
- With the fire service, we want the best equipment, trucks staffed, and equipment maintained
- Want to be able to help our citizens
- No one wants to see a tax increase, but if everyone would just think about it, to improve and go forward, we really need to go ahead and get better equipment
- Do not believe the manager and commissioners are going to fund something that is not reasonable
- We are depending on you
- We also need the funding to improve our services
- Everyone in the county needs this increase to be approved
- Might be some complaints, but if they just think about it, they will be the ones who reap the benefits from a tax increase, whether it is the school system, EMS, or the fire departments
- We want to improve everyone's life in Stokes County

Kristine Mitchell
1005 Case Collins Road
Germanton, NC
Re: **Schools**

Ms. Mitchell presented the following comments:

- I am principal of London Elementary School in Walnut Cove
- Thank you for the support that you give our county school system each year
- Without your funding, our system would not be what it is
- Here to speak on 2 things – personnel allotments and facilities
- Our school system is known for its small size which allows us the ability to best meet the needs of our students, our families, and our communities
- For years, we have been able to grow our students, show high rates of proficiencies, and cater to our communities
- As the years have passed and budgets have been tightened, our employees continue to be asked to do more with less
- Ms. Sara Cornett, London Elementary School, expressed her increased difficulty meeting the needs of her reading students as personnel numbers have dwindled
- Losing staff members meant the loss of our Title One reading specialist a few years ago

- This deficit is surfacing in the decline of reading achievement overall at London and in the county
- I also credit the decline due to fewer teacher assistants, especially in K-3 where ability levels vary greatly among each class and early intervention is key
- We try our best at the elementary levels to use our Title One funds to help supplement the loss position by hiring teachers and tutors
- We can't supplement to a level that fills the gaps that we need
- All of our schools now have combination classes with tutors going in and out daily
- Although our county is known for our small town service, our quality of service is declining two-fold
- First in academics, I pulled up the results from the last 3 years in test scores and our 4th and 5th grade reading and math have declined (from 2013 to Monday, May 30, 2016)
- We have declined in Math and Reading across the county
- In addition to the academic decline, there is a decline in morale, decreased staff means increased duties and reduced planning time while instructional demands and expectations to perform continue to increase
- I don't know if you have ever been in a teacher's lounge in May, it is not a pretty sight
- We do what we can to keep our staff morale up while competing against the state reductions, but please help us to not have to fight against reductions against our own county
- With the numbers declining in the county, the last thing we want to do is show a continuing decline in our academics which we are currently doing and of school morale
- One key to keep this from happening is continued support from you by providing the funds needed to keep personnel in our buildings at or above the level that we currently are
- In addition to lowering the morale of staff, the morale of the entire community is lowered through substandard cleanliness and lowered maintenance of our facilities
- Although, our student numbers are declining, our facilities are staying the same
- For example, I have a 60-year old building that used to be cleaned, maintained, and mowed by two full-time custodians; I now have only one full-time custodian
- London is specifically in need of a parking lot, something that we don't currently have
- Deborah Long, a teacher at London, expressed her concerns specifically saying that if there is any precipitation at all, it is either a pond or an ice ring
- Ms. Long continued saying:
 - That during the time I parked out front up until the middle of last year, I twisted my ankle and almost fell a number of times
 - I now park at the end of the school because it is mostly paved with much of the pavement buckling
 - Although I have a sticker, there are no designated handicapped parking spots at our school
- It is because of these facility needs that I support our Board's capital outlay budget request and hope you will seriously consider it as well
- Appreciate your time and consideration for our students, staff, facilities, and school system as a whole as you look into and work out your budget
- I have worked in 3 different systems and truly Stokes County is the best system
- Please help us keep it that way

Time was called.

Chairman Inman presented the following comments:

- Want to take this opportunity to thank everyone for coming out tonight especially those people who spoke on behalf of their departments and their concerns
- Don't think anyone would be here if you were not genuinely concerned about your county
- You either live in Stokes County or work in Stokes County
- In a perfect world, you would have plenty of revenues to take care of all the needs and some of the wants
- Unfortunately, we don't live in that perfect world, particularly in Stokes County
- Have tried for many years to increase our business revenue
- I have said many, many times; we can't sustain if we have to depend on ad valorem taxes
- Infrastructure is extremely important which is not just water and sewer; it is a quality place to live, to work, and to raise a family
- We have seen our revenues decrease with expenditures increasing
- It is a very difficult task
- I can assure you that each commissioner has listened very carefully tonight
- We are going to go back and make every single dollar work that we possibly can

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board, Chairman Inman adjourned the meeting.

Darlene M. Bullins
Clerk to the Board

J. Leon Inman
Chairman