

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  
TUESDAY JUNE 11, 2019

The Board of Commissioners of the County of Stokes, State of North Carolina, met for a Budget Work Session (Recessed from June 10, 2019) in the Commissioners' Chambers of the Ronald Wilson Reagan Memorial Building (Administration Building) located in Danbury, North Carolina on Tuesday June 11, 2019 at 3:00 pm with the following members present:

Chairman Andy Nickelston  
Vice Chairman Jimmy Walker  
Commissioner Ronnie Mendenhall  
Commissioner Rick Morris

Absent: Commissioner Jamie Yontz

County Personnel in Attendance:  
County Manager Jake M. Oakley  
Assistant County Manager/Clerk to the Board Shannon Shaver  
Finance Director Julia Edwards  
Arts Director Eddy McGee  
EMS Director Brandon Gentry

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

#### **INVOCATION**

Vice Chairman Walker delivered the invocation.

#### **GENERAL GOVERNMENT-GOVERNING BODY-PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chairman Nickelston invited those in attendance to join the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **GENERAL GOVERNMENT – GOVERNING BODY – APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Chairman Nickelston noted that the meeting was recessed from June 10, 2019 and would continue from where the Board left off.

Chairman Nickelston noted that the meeting would follow the open format and that there would be a couple of Department Heads in attendance today to answer questions regarding budget items.

(Any Attachments presented during the meeting will be attached at the conclusion of the minutes or available upon request from the Clerk to the Board.)

### **Department Head Budget Discussion**

Chairman Nickelston turned the floor over to Arts Director Eddy McGee.

Arts Director Eddy McGee commented:

- I am asking for funding for Arts Place Market Manager position.
- We are asking for this due to the growth of the Arts Place from the original scope.
- We have withdrawn the request for this position in a past budget but due to the fact the we are now open 364 days per year we need this position.
- You could say we are a victim of our own success.
- The responsibility of that position is huge.
- We have over 100 vendors and managing a schedule for 25 volunteers and the rental schedule for the Arts Place itself which has increased as well.
- We did not foresee how much the space would be used by other government entities.
- This is all at no cost to these organizations.
- The market manager is responsible for coordinating these events, setting up tables, a/v equipment, and breaking down.
- The sales tax generated adds economic development to the county.
- Making this position a county position will add stability and make us able to attract and retain a qualified employee by being able to offer benefits.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- I want to commend you for the job you are doing.
- I hear great things about what you are doing at the Arts Place.
- We have a lot of new positions requests in the budget and we certainly can't fund them all.
- There are some that require special consideration and this may be one of them.
- I remember two years ago you asked the Board to fund this position with the offer that the Arts Council would reimburse the county.
- This seems like a shift from that request.
- Is this the same position?

Arts Director Eddy McGee responded:

- The position has evolved.
- It was not in our business plan to use the space for government events.
- We have had over 10,000 people enter the building since July 1<sup>st</sup>.
- The tourism aspect is huge.
- Lots of people come in for tourism information.
- The responsibility has increased due to success.
- It is a very busy venue.
- Our venue is pretty much the talk of the state.
- We have a \$1.4 million arts venue with a town with not much more than a 100 people and no stop lights.
- We provide programs for the schools.
- The schools have actually attended some programs at the Arts Place.
- The kids love it and they get to see a performance somewhere besides in the gym.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- You are exactly what I am proud to have in this county and tell people about.

Art Director Eddy McGee responded:

- I appreciate that but I couldn't do this without the great team I have both at the Arts Place and in the county.
- I appreciate the working relationship we have together.

Commissioner Mendenhall requested that for the benefit of those new to the Board if Arts Director Eddy McGee could give an overview of the Arts Place positions.

Art Director Eddy McGee responded:

- I have two titles which are Director of Arts and Cultural Services for the County of Stokes and I have the Executive Director Title which is my non-profit title for the Arts Council.
- I have a full salary and benefits from the county.
- It was not always that way.
- I am the principle grant writer and fund raiser.
- We also have an Administrative Assistant position who also has an Arts Council title of Operations Manager who is Felicia Shaw.
- We run several hundred thousand dollars through our office and she manages this and runs the marketing and tourism alongside Tory Mabe.
- The position we are asking for is a Market Manager for our new facility.
- I also serve on the N.C. Arts Council Board.
- I am part of a good team and I am honored to be here.
- It is a very inspiring space.
- We are actually the model now for counties considering combining with the Arts.
- Other people are noticing which means we are doing something right.
- We appreciate all the support from the County.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- I appreciate you providing this information and all that you do.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- I thought this should have been a government position from day one.
- I am in support of this position being fully funded.
- Three people are there working every day except Christmas Day.
- This position has been earned through what has been done.
- They are like an Economic Development engine.
- Like the fact that they could be cross trained with another government employee which can increase your flexibility.
- There is a tremendous amount of recurring funding being brought in for the programs.
- If you look at it from a merit stand point this position has been earned.
- There is a signature event coming in October that might change the face of the whole thing.
- Would like to look at the grade Eddy is on as a Department Head when we discuss the classification structure.
- There is a tremendous amount of knowledge and education required for Eddy's position.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- I campaigned on economic development and you are one of the main people in the county that is doing this.
- You have to have more people to continue to grow.
- I am wowed by how much it has grown.
- I am sure you do many of the responsibilities listed on this job description.
- I am in full support of this position.
- Appreciate you and all of your work.

Chairman Nickelston expressed his gratitude to Arts Director Eddy McGee for attending the meeting today.

#### Brandon Gentry – EMS Director

Chairman Nickelston turned the floor over to EMS Director Brandon Gentry.

EMS Director Brandon Gentry commented:

- Appreciate you having me back a second time.
- I have tried to watch the meetings online so I can be prepared to answer any questions.
- The sixth ambulance is needed.
- We have doubled our call volume over the last 14 years.
- We need the ambulance station to house the two trucks.
- I know we cannot fund the 24/72 at this time but we really need the true time and a half to go along with the sixth ambulance to be able to staff this.

- We really have to have this in order to get and retain employees.
- Adding this ambulance adds six employees.
- Our goal is to have two paramedics on every truck due to our transport time.
- We are generally with the patient 45 minutes.
- We don't generally hire EMT's full time unless they are in paramedic school.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- There has been some discussion among the Board on building a facility in this budget and then bringing on the ambulance and the staff in the next budget.
- What are your thoughts on that?

EMS Director Brandon Gentry responded:

- That is a good thought.
- We do need this as fast as we can get it to provide service to the people of Stokes County.
- We do not want to be in the situation of not having an ambulance.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- True over time has always been a mystery to me.
- Are the other counties that are doing this planning to stay with this or go to true time and a half?
- If we were the only county doing this, it would hurt your staffing even more I would assume.

EMS Director Brandon Gentry responded:

- It is in Surry's budget but I am not sure if it has been approved.
- We are already losing people to Davie County due to the 24/72 schedule.
- If Surry changes to true overtime and we do not, we will lose people more people to Surry.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- EMS staffing has always been an issue.
- It seems you are doing some better with this and we want to keep that moving in the right direction.

Chairman Nickelston extended his gratitude to EMS Director Brandon Gentry for attending the meeting today.

(Chairman Nickelston called for a short recess at 4:05 pm)

(Chairman Nickelston called the meeting back to order at 4:20 pm)

## **Budget Deliberations**

Commissioner Morris commented:

- When Commissioner Yontz gets here can we talk about how we are going to finish the budget?

Chairman Nickelston responded:

- I agree we need to start working towards finalizing the budget and know it would make Julia's life easier if we can approve this sooner than later.
- I realize she has a lot of work to do once this is approved.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- I have been thinking back to the 4 cent fund and want to be sure I am not telling our citizens something that is not true.
- I am trying to remember my position on this from the beginning as far as changing the use but I think if we stay on the course of using this for school projects we are not deferring much from the original intent.
- I am not as rigid on that as it may have sounded in the beginning now that I have had time to think about this.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- I am wondering if the Board would consider holding off on one green box site and maybe just do the one that is most needed now?

Vice Chairman Walker responded:

- There is need for improvement at both sites.
- It does come down to how far we can stretch our funds.
- We want to stay at 25% in the fund balance and we do not have unlimited funds.
- I could consider approving the site that needs the most work now and work on the other one next year.
- It sounds as if Walnut Cove has the most immediate need.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- I remember back in January it was said that we had too many meetings last year and it looks like we are on track to have more this year.
- We are going to be coming down to the wire.
- We have a lot of decision left to make.
- I heard that Wake County approved their budget last night and they did not increase their property tax with a budget increase of 6 to 7 percent.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- There has to be some give and take.
- No one is going to fully get their way on everything and this is just how the process works.
- We have to all be willing to compromise.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- Speaking of too many meetings I saw on social media that someone is requesting that we address Commissioner Pay policy.
- I have made my position on this and am waiting for the other Board members to weigh in.
- I am good either way and my position has not changed on this.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- I believe that person is insinuating that we are calling special meetings to get more pay which is not true.
- If we go to a flat rate when someone can't attend they would still get paid.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- I would only agree to a flat rate pay system if there was a deduction for missed meetings.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- I would like to leave it as it is.
- You get paid for meetings you attend and you do not get paid for meetings you do not attend.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- I will say no one is doing this for the money.
- It is pretty low pay for all that you have to do.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- My goal was never to lower the pay it was just to establish a policy easier for the public to understand.
- I agree that I spend a lot of time attending meetings both in and outside the county.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- The pay has been about the same for 20 years with the exception of COLA.
- We used to receive mileage and that was done away with to look into going to a flat rate but this was not done and only the mileage was taken away and the pay stayed the same.
- I will keep an open mind but we have so much work to do we may need to look into this at a later time.
- I have never really had anyone complain to me and the ones that have asked are shocked to find out how little we actually get paid.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- The only real advantage I see to a flat rate pay system is from a budgeting standpoint so you would know exactly what to budget.
- I think we pretty much know that already but that would make it more exact.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- The only time this really differs is during budget meetings.
- It also depends on how many outside meetings we are attending as how many Boards and Committees we serve on.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- We briefly discussed an occupancy tax and want to know if anyone has thought more about this.

Vice Chairman Walker commented:

- There is a negative stigma within our county of any tax increases.
- Although this would be a tax paid by visitors.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- When I was campaigning I asked lots of people and they all said to do it.
- I did not receive any negative feedback on this at all.
- I would like to see a policy from somewhere on occupancy tax.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- There are more places to stay than I realized as I started looking into this.
- I would like to get this in place and the money received goes back into economic development.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- I have tried to put together a position on some things as we all need to do to complete the budget.
- First we all need to decide about the school budget and how much of the capital we can fund.
- If we decide to give them a fund balance, we will need to know what they have right now that needs to be added to.
- Feel like we were in agreement on the list of 1-20 and adding the \$75,000.00 for the track.
- We have the capital project list that we need to make decisions on.
- We just need to say yes or no to these items.
- We need to decide on the water project at Meadows and if we are going to hire an engineer.
- There is a lot of money that can be freed up or not by deciding on these projects.
- We need to make a decision about a COLA.
- We have half a million in the Economic Development budget with no specific purpose at this time.
- We have the 4 cent fund to decide if we are going to put money into or not this year.
- We also have to look more into the personnel requests.
- One approach could be to take a look at the list and identify definite positions on some things and cross them off the list.
- Doing this will help to resolve the rest of the list.
- This is my thought process up to this point.

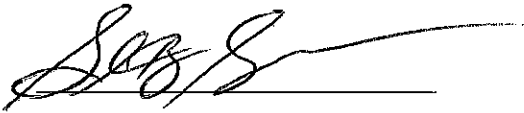


County Manager Oakley noted that Finance Director Julia Edwards has been working on some figures to make some cuts and keep the fund balance at 25%.

Finance Director Julia Edwards presented the Board with some information on possible areas to decrease the budget.

**Adjournment**

With no further business to come before the Board, Chairman Nickelston recessed the Budget Work Session at 5:40 pm until the conclusion of the Joint Meeting with then Board of Education following this meeting.



**Shannon Shaver**

**Clerk to the Board**



**Andy Nickelston**

**Chairman**