

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 JANUARY 17, 2023

The Board of Commissioners of the County of Stokes, State of North Carolina, met for a Senior Work Session in the Commissioners' Chambers of the Ronald Wilson Reagan Memorial Building (Administration Building) located in Danbury, North Carolina on Tuesday January 17, 2023 at 9:30 am with the following members present:

Chairman Rick Morris
Vice Chairman Brad Chandler
Commissioner Sonya Cox
Commissioner Ronnie Mendenhall
Commissioner Keith Wood

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

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

INVOCATION

Chairman Morris invited those in attendance to join the Board in the invocation, if so desired. Chairman Morris delivered the Invocation.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT-GOVERNING BODY-PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

GENERAL GOVERNMENT – GOVERNING BODY – APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Morris entertained a motion to approve or amend today's agenda.

Vice-Chairman Chandler moved to approve today's agenda as presented.

Commissioner Mendenhall seconded the motion.

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

With no discussion, the Agenda was approved unanimously.

SENIOR WORK SESSION

Chairman Morris presented the following information regarding today's and future senior work sessions:

- Purpose and process of the senior work sessions:
 - Purpose of the leadership team work sessions is to update and baseline the state of Stokes County government as the new commissioner board is seated
 - This baseline will represent a snapshot in time and can be used to measure results as the new board works to resolve issues in its role as policy maker and budget approval authority for the county
 - It will provide the county's leaders an opportunity to describe to the Board the state of their organizations as we enter 2023
 - The primary objectives of the process are to inform the commissioners so they can remove roadblocks, if possible, assist senior leaders and at the same time, provide complete transparency to the public regarding what goes on in local government and who makes up the Stokes County senior leadership team
 - Process for the work session will be individual 30-to-60-minute time blocks with the Board which will include the county manager, assistant county manager, finance officer, and department heads
 - Guidance is included on specific topics that all presenters should include if applicable
 - Time blocks will be structured to allow 10 to 30 minutes for commissioners and presenters to ask each other questions at the end
 - Members of the Health Board, Department of Social Services Board, and Board of Elections will be invited to attend if they so desire
 - Departments run by elected officials are invited to participate at the discretion of the elected official
 - Both the Sheriff and the Register of Deeds are planning to participate
 - A separate closed session time block will be offered at the conclusion of the presentations if anyone wishes to come back and discuss topics that can't be discussed in open session
 - The work sessions will be informal discussion and will be livestreamed
 - Departmental handouts regarding statistical data/information will be permitted, but not required
 - A schedule has been established with all participants for all upcoming work sessions
 - Topics for discussion for all departments if applicable:
 - A short executive overview of the mission and function of your organization
 - Any high-level thoughts or considerations, if you have any, for your next annual budget submission

- Address the adequacy of the training in your organization
- Have you done any succession planning related to professional development for your organization
- Address your annual personnel turnover percentage and/or any personnel issues that can be discussed in closed session if necessary
- Provide thoughts regarding how the Forsyth Tech campus located in Meadows (program, capabilities, and/or resources) might be integrated into your operations to benefit your organization and leverage the benefits on having the local Forsyth Tech campus in Meadows
- Discuss short- and long-term goals you have, if any, for your organization
- List and prioritize the top three things in your organization, if any, that keep you up at night and why (can be discussed in closed session if necessary)
- Update on part time salaries and how much has been paid out for compensatory time in your organization
- Department heads can propose questions to the entire Board or to a specific commissioner to be answered now or at later date
- Each commissioner will be given an opportunity to ask questions to each presenter
- A separate closed session will be offered at the end of the presentations if anyone wishes to come back and discuss topics that can't be discussed in open session
- Would like to get an update at the end of the work sessions:
 - Budget execution review from county manager and finance director (finance director has already provided a budget variance that partly accomplishes this request)
 - Update on the feasibility study and market analysis being done for Stokes Reynolds Memorial Hospital
 - Status of courthouse renovation project
 - Status of acquisition and transition of the former bank facility for the Board of Elections
 - Status of construction of new animal shelter
 - Status of two green box sites renovation projects
- Adjustments can be made if needed as we go along
- Would like for Amber to keep information regarding any action, if needed
- Closed session, if needed, may be able to be done at a regular meeting (can be decided by the Board at the end of the work session)
- Each work sessions will be recessed so that each work session is not considered a separate regular meeting

With no discussion, Chairman Morris opened the work session with the Administration Department.

Administration

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to County Manager Shannon Shaver to discuss the Administration Department. (Assistant County Manager/Clerk Amber Brown was also present)

County Manager Shaver discussed the following items/concerns with the Board: (provided the Board with a handout)

- Administration consists of two staff members
- Transferred the department's vehicle to Health Department – better utilization
- Working on public records policy to hopefully be presented at an upcoming meeting
- Working on an organizational chart for the entire county
- Amber has completed clerk's training at the School of Government
- In last year's budget message, one of the major goals was to have less budget amendments and provide a realistic budget – currently have presented fewer budget amendments than last year
- Emergency contingency – Budgeted \$150,000 – currently have \$69,384.41 remaining
- Leave contingency – Budgeted \$125,000 – no funds left due to many long-term employees retiring and new pay out of compensatory time across the departments (non-exempt employees are being paid for accrued overtime hours over 75 hours instead of the 240 hours mandated payout)
- Fuel contingency – have not used any - \$75,000 remains
- Animal Control budget has increased due to major changes within the department
 - There will be a budget amendment presented soon to appropriate more funds to fund overtime hours and salaries for Animal Control
 - Can go into further discussion regarding Animal Control with the chief animal control officer when she presents her information
- Current debt schedule:
 - Autumn Square facility mortgage terminates June 2023
 - Mortgage has fulfilled the commitment to the taxpayers that this purchase would not cost the county any taxpayers' dollars
 - The rent collected has completely pay the mortgage
 - No taxpayers' dollars have been used for the purchase of this property
 - Equipment financed in 2019 - final payment this fiscal year
 - Equipment financed in 2020 - has two years of payments remaining
 - Equipment financed in 2021- has three years of payments remaining
 - American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds were used to purchase equipment for Fiscal Year 2022-23 – no debt was added to the current budget for equipment
 - There are other larger debts that do not go off for several years that Finance can go further in detail such as schools, jail, etc.
- Projects budgeted this fiscal year:
 - Roof for Administrative Building (completed) – came in under budget (\$57,000 less than budget)
 - DSS Roof (completed) – came in under budget (\$107,600 less than budget)
 - HVAC replacement equipment for DSS has been ordered (not completed) – came in around budget (\$9,226.00 less than budget)
 - Some of the excess funding was used for the solid waste truck purchase that was underbudgeted (\$61,288 transferred for purchase of truck) (\$33,207 remains unallocated at this time unless needed for projects that are not completed/installed)

- Renovations/upgrades for the Greenbox Sites at Pinnacle and Walnut Cove are projected to be done in April which has been delayed due to inclement weather conditions
- Courthouse Renovation Project
 - Met with Architect Perry Peterson last week to get the project started
 - Meeting with judges at the end of the month to discuss their needs
 - Getting some preliminary rock studies done
 - Architect Peterson noted the possibility of replacing the control system and the 40-year-old boiler
 - Architect Peterson will be presenting a schematic design to the Board at a future meeting
- Board of Elections Project (renovations to the former bank building) – Board of Elections and staff meeting later this week with Architect Peterson regarding the renovations and their needs
- New Animal Shelter – Request for Qualifications is on the county website with a deadline of January 26, 2023 at 4:00 pm
 - Animal Study Group will be meeting with staff to review the Request for Qualifications
- Currently taking care of all the grant reporting which is very time consuming
- Hospital Update – Board received the latest update at the recent Hospital Board of Trustees’ meeting (hospital feasibility study is slightly delayed – expected completion date for the feasibility study has not been determined)
- Would be discussing demolition of the old prison camp later with Purchasing Manager Glenda Pruitt

Vice Chairman Chandler confirmed with Manager Shaver that the county recently had a building study done in 2020 which provided the county with information/data regarding lifespan of county facilities, hospital, along with one being done for the schools.

Manager Shaver also noted that the public works director is currently using that building study when addressing issues and looking at preventive maintenance.

Commissioner Wood noted the need to stay away from flat roofs.

Chairman Morris noted that in past budgets, some funding has been placed in capital reserve for emergencies such as roofs, HVAC, etc. which is never enough if something major happens but at least it is a start.

Commissioner Mendenhall noted the decrease in budget amendments during the year which is greatly appreciated.

Chairman Morris commented:

- Have discussed with Finance Director Lankford about possibly changing the format of the budget amendments to be more user friendly – more information so the public can easily understand what is being done
- Would like to see a draft of the county O chart that is being prepared

- Confirmed with Manager Shaver the contingency leave line item is already exhausted (\$125,000) – payout for retirees, resignations, etc.
- Would like to look at the compensatory leave cut off at 75 hours for non-exempt employees, not sure 75 hours is the right number to be using (changed last year from 240 hours to 75 hours)
- Need to look at recouping any unused funding during the fourth quarter
- Noted the mortgage payment for Autumn Square which terminates in June 2023 (model when purchased was that rent received would cover mortgage with no county taxpayers' dollars needed for mortgage) may need to be relooked at to determine whether to continue renting out offices or possibly using as a county facility
- Confirmed with Manager Shaver that equipment parts for the PA system in the chambers is on order to alleviate issues with the public not being able to hear what is going on
- Regarding demolition of the old prison camp, with everything else going on, not in any hurry for that project and would like to hear other board members' opinion at sometime

County Manager Shaver discussed demolition with the Board regarding the placement of the new animal shelter on that space.

The Board unanimously agreed to discuss the issue of demolition further with Director Eddy McGee.

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Would like to further discuss security of county facilities possibly in closed session

Commissioner Wood noted the need for better lighting in the administrative parking lot.

Chairman Morris continued:

- Confirmed with Manager Shaver that the Board of Elections' project is being funded by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding
- Would like to make sure the county is tracking all the ARPA funding being received and completing all required reports correctly and timely
- Confirmed with Manager Shaver that the accident review board is still current under the Fire Marshal's Office which tries to help keep insurance rates lower and hopefully eliminating future accidents

Vice Chairman Chandler noted the need to make sure training is being provided to those driving county vehicles to reduce incidents.

County Manager Shaver commented:

- Still hearing from departments such as Sheriff's Department, Jail, DSS, etc. regarding recruiting and maintaining employees
- Will probably be hearing these same comments from department heads during these work sessions
- Using some creative ways to staff some of the departments – this is a across the state issue

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Recruitment and retainment are definitely a national problem
- Would like to hear from departments what is currently being done regarding this issue

The Board briefly discussed the recruitment and retainment of employees along with a possible internship program.

Chairman Morris noted that a lot of other counties are doing repeated pay studies even though they recently had one performed.

Chairman Morris recessed the work session for a five-minute break.

Chairman Morris called the recessed meeting back to order.

Tax Administration

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to Tax Administrator Richard Brim.

Tax Administrator Richard Brim discussed the following items/concerns with the Board:
(provided the Board with a detailed handout)

- Discussed the mission and functions of Tax Administration and Mapping/GIS
- Discussed a cross training program for the department along with a performance review for each employee
- Requesting the Board consider an incentive program (a succession plan) for cross training with compensation for the Tax/Mapping Departments with the upcoming budget
- Would like feedback from the Board regarding the cross-training compensation plan
- Historically have very little turnover in the Tax Department/Mapping but currently have five eligible for retirement
- Short term goals are to meet taxpayers' needs and meet all required reporting
- Long term goals:
 - Conduct a successful 2025 revaluation
 - Perform a business/personal property compliance review program
 - Educate/inform citizens through town hall meetings (next meeting February 16, 2023 – King Senior Center)
- Multiple department goals/projects to consider:
 - Occupancy tax
 - Dan River mile markers to promote public safety and enhance tourism
 - Creation of a county-wide cemetery data base directory
- Discussed the top three issues that “keep the department head up at night”
 - County wide reappraisal – single most complex task of the department
 - Crossing training for employees – department has five employees currently eligible for retirement
 - Maintaining morale within the department – currently allow flex scheduling
- Don't currently have any questions for the Board – honor to serve the citizens of Stokes County and the Board of County Commissioners
- Our departments are willing and ready to serve the citizens of Stokes County

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

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Appreciate the format and copy of the concerns presented to the Board today – very easy to follow and great reference tool
- Confirmed with Tax Administrator Brim that the market will hopefully correct itself by the time of the next revaluation (regarding the high increase in home prices during the past two years and now the declining of home prices)
- Would like to see the Dan River mile marker project happen – would be very helpfully for county departments as well as for the citizens/visitors; interested in hearing more about the occupancy tax

Commissioner Wood commented:

- Agree with Commissioner Cox – very good presentation and appreciate the copy for future reference
- Would like to also hear more about an occupancy tax

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Appreciate your thought process – looking at ways to better the county
- Need to bring the right type of businesses to Stokes County
- Confirmed with Tax Administrator Brim that their department should be one (besides Economic Development) that any new business or an existing business that is expanding should reach out to
- Confirmed with Tax Administrator Brim that his department has considered mailing out an information package to new businesses or an existing business that is expanding (Tax Administrator Brim noted that he hopes to get that project started very soon)

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Like the way you are using the flex schedule to increase morale
- Like the cross-training concept
- In my seventh year as a county commissioner and will say that I have not had one complaint regarding the Tax Department during that time

Chairman Morris commented:

- Confirmed with Tax Administrator Brim that he is not currently doing employee performance evaluations but intends to put performance evaluations into the cross-training program
- One topic I have discussed before becoming a commissioner that never gained any traction was merit pay for overachieved employees – do believe most people generally support the concept of merit pay
- Believe the cross-training program you mentioned somewhat fits into a merit program
- Maybe a component of cross training could be included in the merit program
- Have to remember that once you approve an incentive program for one department, you have to treat all departments the same in some form or fashion
- Can include the cross-training program in the budget for the Board to evaluate
- Support the occupancy tax

County Manager Shaver noted that the Board needs to lobby the NC Legislature regarding an occupancy tax for Stokes County.

Chairman Morris continued:

- Agree with using the flex schedule that makes the work environment better for employees without a recurring cost to the county budget
- Need to develop incentives regarding the work environment that aren't recurring costs to the budget
- Confirmed with Tax Administrator Brim that the department still has a county road map atlas that anyone can purchase – majority of those are printed for departments such as Sheriff's Department/EMS
- Briefly discussed the current safety committee duties/responsibilities
- Briefly discussed capital needs of the department – 16-year-old plotter that could possibly quit at any time
- Requested information regarding delinquent taxes

Tax Administrator Brim responded:

- Have made a conscious effort and worked hard to decrease delinquent taxes
- Try to work with all citizens:
 - Setting up payment plans, when possible
 - Garnish wages
 - Don't attach to bank accounts-very risky procedure
 - Have a foreclosure policy that was approved in 2019 by the Board of County Commissioners working with the county attorney's office and an outside agency who specializes in foreclosures when needed
- Electronic pay has helped with no cost to the taxpayer
- Real property is never written off the books – can be sold as a last resort
- Real hard to attach to personal property – have a third-party collection agency along with using NC Debt Setoff (can intercept state tax refunds/lottery winnings)
- Could possibly write off some older bills that are no longer collectable
- Continuing the same billing process for EMS – continuing to try to work with those who are unable to pay

Chairman Morris expressed the Board's appreciation for the update.

Tax Administrator Brim expressed his appreciation to the Board for allowing departments to bring their concerns and ideas before the Board.

Information Systems

Chairman Morris turned the floor over to Information Technology (IT) Director Dianna Fulp.

IT Director Fulp discussed the following items/concerns with the Board: (IT Senior Analyst David Jones was also present for the discussion) (provided the Board a handout)

- Discussed next year's budget - IT department definitely needs to be aware of any software/equipment being purchased which is usually not the case – leaving the department with no choice but to make it work
- Been having issues with departments signing up for free software on a trial basis – which usually causes problems
- Have been speaking with finance director/purchasing manager regarding a needed policy for the purchase of software and/or equipment
- As far as training - no time for training due to being short staffed – only two in the office
- Do not know have a solution for being short staffed – welcome any suggestions
- Short/long term goals would be recruiting and retaining adequate staff, the need for IT to be recognized as a crucial component to the county operations (doesn't feel like that – always the last to know about certain things involving IT and departments purchasing software without notifying IT)

Commissioner Wood commented:

- Would like to say one thing – that has to be stopped – playing with fire – train wreck getting ready to happen

IT Director Fulp continued:

- Cyber security is an area that is being addressed, but must continue to be heavily addressed
- In my opinion, the E911 Advisory Committee needs to be restored to help handle software and internal control issues for those on the Spillman System
- Believe an internal county intranet would be very helpful
- Top three issues that “keeps a department head up at night”
 - Cyber security has to be number one – do have email and webserver to address this along with some other security software (have employee email training for all new employees regarding phishing)
 - The need for an acquisition policy for the purchase of all IT software/equipment
 - Prior notification to the IT Department regarding new hires or moving of current employees (could have equipment ready before new employee(s) when they arrive the first day instead of them having to wait) along with those leaving employment
- Questions for the Board of Commissioners:
 - Would like to know what improvements, recommendations, and/or suggestions that the Board would like to see the IT Department accomplish or put into play
- Can go into further discussion regarding some of the issues mentioned, but would need to do that in closed session

Chairman Morris responded a closed session is available for all department heads at the end of the work sessions.

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Appreciate the work hard and dedication of the current staff
- Can't believe the county only has two employees that keep up with the day-to-day normal operations of county government along with trying to be proactive to current issues

- Technology touches every single department of local government
- IT director needs to be doing a lot of other things besides day-to-day operations
- Department staff needs cutting edge training with certifications, but can understand that can't happen when IT is only a two-person department working 24/7
- Somehow the madness has to stop – it is going to collapse with something bad happening
- Believe some of the issues are communication which can be handled
- Confirmed with Manager Shaver that the county has not had regular department head meetings due to COVID - sending out needed information through emails (meeting as needed)
- Department head meetings need to start happening on a regular scheduled basis
- Suggested every item being considered for the budget needs to have prior approval from needed departments before it even reaches the county manager who needs to make sure the right departments have reviewed the request

County Manager Shaver responded:

- All IT major software and equipment is verified by IT before submission to the annual budget
- If things are being purchased outside the budget and I am not informed about, then that is something that we need to discuss

IT Director Fulp responded:

- Not all software purchases go through the budget process which I could elaborate more in a closed session

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- Confirmed with IT Director Fulp that some departments are contacting software vendors directly for demonstrations and not going through IT which should not be happening

Commissioner Wood commented:

- Seems like there are some needed policies for employees to follow
- This is nothing to mess with
- Can download one item that can lock up an entire system

Vice Chairman Chandler continued:

- Have been talking to several departments since coming on board as a commissioner
- Confirmed with IT Analyst Jones that if an employee has a major IT issue during the night shift, he tries to fix remotely but has had to come out during the night
- Confirmed with IT Director Fulp that the department contracts with an outside vendor for major conversion projects and now comes once a month to help

Commissioner Cox commented:

- The department has had a vacancy that has been advertised for a very long time, it is not like we haven't tried to get them some help

Vice Chairman Chandler

- Confirmed with IT Director Fulp that the department does contract with SouthData for major projects (such as server replacement) along with coming one day a month to help out with other issues
- Suggested looking into assistance from a remote help desk that could work afterhours issues that are not major
- Not upset with your department but am upset with the way you have been treated – shocked you are both still here
- You are a staff of two that is on call 24/7 for the entire county
- Collectively, there are certain things that we have to push forward as a Board to give relief and improve the level of service
- When we look at staff turnover and efficiency, technology is at the cutting edge of being able to do things and make things more efficient and more effective
- I am not an IT professional; I am just someone who has had to use IT in my career and my officers depended on IT to function
- I take an interest when it comes to looking into what can make it easier and more efficient for the citizens and staff – streamlining
- I haven't yet found one application form on the county website that you can complete and send directly to the department
- A person should be able to complete certain applications and send directly to a specific department – saving trips to the department
- I understand why that can't happen with a two-person department
- It makes me very upset, but not at staff who are doing all they can do to keep up with the day-to-day operations of the entire county government

Commissioner Cox noted Vice Chairman Chandler brings up some very good points, but discussing personnel and things that have happened in the past regarding personnel should be in a closed session.

Commissioner Cox noted that there are things being considered that will help them that can't be discussed yet in open session.

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- I am not wanting to discuss specifics about personnel or the past
- If that is what it takes, I can make a motion to go into closed session right now

Chairman Morris noted there will be an opportunity for closed sessions for all department heads at the end of the senior work sessions as I see there is no real reason to have a closed session right now.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Have a lot of comments but they need to be discussed in closed session
- We can sit here and discuss issue after issue asking millions of questions that we probably already know some of the answers
- During COVID, every meeting with Forsyth Tech and Stokes Partnership for Children was a zoom meeting

- I often had times that I couldn't connect to my meetings, I would call David and he would remotely get me fixed
- These two employees do a great job for just being a two person department
- I know we need more people; everyone knows they need more than two people
- Technology is now, it is the future
- I do have some things to say, but need to be done in closed session

Vice Chairman Chandler responded:

- I think you made a good point when you spoke about David being able to remotely fix the issue you had with connecting to a zoom meeting
- That is what I have been trying to say, if we continue to do things like we always have – things will never change
- I do get it they need more staff, but other IT departments conduct business, and they don't have to get into closed session to develop ways to get additional assistance

Commissioner Cox responded:

- I was only talking about going into closed session to talk about historical background data not why we can't get them more help
- They definitely do need more help
- We need to get more employees in their department

Commissioner Wood noted he had no comments at this time, believed enough had been said.

Chairman Morris commented:

- My perspective on the subject:
 - Have gone through various hiring trying to fill the open position – various trials and tribulations
 - I think it is very clear that we have always needed three people at a minimum in that department and probably more
 - What is triggering all this is that we have our two folks who are eligible or getting close to be eligible to retire
 - We know that day is coming which maybe soon
 - To me that is the trigger that says we have got to do a whole lot different really quick
 - We have got to have a plan in place to transition over the next whatever that number of years is when these two decide to enjoy their retirement that they have definitely earned
- As Commissioner Cox noted the county has taken one step, if it materializes, can be announced hopefully very soon
- We as a Board have to analyze this situation with your input as to what this transition should look like – number of employees, costs, training, etc.
- Definitely do need to talk about network security issues in closed session
- It will cost money to fix the issues
- Everything here rides on the network and when it is down, nothing works

- In the near term, we need to work on some policies and procedures
- Every department head should never say the word “software” without you guys being involved in it from day one
- The idea of department heads inviting vendors to display and/or discuss software programs without your knowledge needs to stop immediately
- Department heads should not be signing up for trial software without IT being involved
- Do believe we need to discuss some things in closed session
- Want to get a real understanding of our network and how it stands up against other counties

Commissioner Cox suggested having an outside company come in and assess our systems and report back to the Board.

IT Director Fulp commented:

- Would be happy to discuss issues in closed session

Commissioner Cox confirmed with IT Director Fulp that this department did not oversee computers/software for the Clerk of Superior Court and the court system; but since 2015, this department has done all the wiring and cabling (state passed this down to the county).

Vice Chairman Chandler confirmed with IT Director Fulp that their department maintains all records regarding county computers, printers, etc. along with maintenance records.

County Manager Shaver noted that when an employee resigns, retires, etc., the department head is responsible for acquiring any county property from the employee and returning to IT.

IT Analyst Jones noted that most of the time, the department head holds the equipment (such as a laptop) until needed by another employee at which time, we set up the computer/laptop for the next employee.

IT Director Fulp reiterated the need to know when new employees are coming and where they are going in order to get equipment ready before that new employee arrives.

County Manager Shaver noted the need-to-know what departments are not notifying IT when employees are leaving and coming in order to address the issue.

Chairman Morris requested IT Director Fulp to expand her comments regarding an intranet for the county.

IT Director Fulp responded:

- Intranet would save on the hundreds of copies being made
- Employees could review things like the personnel handbook, procedures etc.
- County currently has one that has limited information
- Really need to expand the one we have and use it
- It is for county employees – not public

Chairman Morris concluded that the Board would do a closed session at a later time.

Chairman Morris recessed the work session for a ten-minute break.

Chairman Morris called the recessed meeting back to order.

Human Resources

Chairman Morris turned the meeting over to Human Resources (HR) Director Gayle Tucker.

Human Resources Director Tucker discussed the following items/concerns with the Board: (Handout presented to the Board) (Assistant Human Resources Director Jamie Clark was also present for the discussion)

- Discussed the HR mission statement
- Main functions of the HR Department
 - Recruitment, selection, and onboarding
 - Compensation
 - Benefits
 - Labor relationships
 - Grievance
 - Discipline
 - Health and safety welfare
 - Record keeping
 - Timecard management
- Keep in mind, we are basically a 24/7 operation, for example could be called if there was an incident involving worker's comp. after normal work hours
- High level thoughts and consideration for the upcoming budget year:
 - Add an additional employee to the department (currently have two staff members)
 - Current employees are cross trained in order for the department to function efficiently if one member of the staff is absence
- Accuracy and timeliness are the key components to our department for day-to-day operations, reporting, etc.
- HR has no issues with turnover of staff, but like develop a new report for department heads and/or county commissioners regarding departmental turnover rates
- HR would like to partner with Forsyth Tech to provide supervision, leadership or professional development training for county department heads and/or supervisors
- Short term goals:
 - Would like to be able to do cost effective things that would boost morale within the county departments
 - Implementation of mass new hire orientations
 - Review the personnel policy handbook annually
 - Reiterated the need to develop a new report for department heads and/or county commissioners regarding departmental turnover rates
- Long term goals:
 - Have an annual policy educational review meeting with department heads
 - Provided an employee portal which would allow employees to access personal information such as check stubs, W2s, etc. from their phones and/or computers

- Explore operations that would allow affordable health care for employees who carry family members
- Driver's license monitoring services – reporting of DUIs, revoked licenses, etc.
- Employee wellness program – to improve employee attendance, morale, employee engagement, increase productivity, reduce health care costs, teamwork and attract new employees
- Top three issues that “keeps a department head up at night”) Assistant HR Director Clark spoke about these issues:
 - List of duties versus the number of staff
 - Auditors last year presented a list of segregation of duties (list of duties provided to the Board) that needed to be between finance/payroll and HR
 - Last year, county manager moved a few duties from Risk Management located in the Fire Marshal's Office to HR
 - All these other assigned duties have decreased the amount of service that HR provides to employees as a whole
 - Has added a lot of stress to our department along with more room for error on our part – two employees
 - Doing the best, we can do to properly and accurately in confidentiality take care of all of our county employees which is approximately 500+ (includes part and full-time employees)
 - Feel they deserve more than what we are capable of giving them to say that likely
 - Having more time would allow time to work with department heads and reach our goals
 - Feel these goals are unattainable with the current amount of HR duties and the current number of staff
- Challenges and troubles with the approved salary plan
 - May need to go into closed session for discussion of personnel
 - Need a definite policy for salary computation relating to new hire or promotions
 - Have approximately 20 days to get everything turned into payroll for everyone to get paid (two staff members key everything into the payroll system, employee benefit system, and the timecard system)
 - Last year, did 117 new employee enrollments, did 140 resignations, retirement, and 42 worker's comp. claims
 - Retirement for one employee is a 60-day process
 - Current handbook requires three-weeks' notice for exempt employees and two-weeks' notice for non-exempt employees
- Communication with department heads which could be further discussed in a closed session (not getting information in a timely manner)
 - For example, a salary recommendation from a department head has to be approved by three different department heads: human resources, finance, and county manager
 - Often an employee has been working for a week before being seen by HR
 - Some worker comp incidents are not being timely reported – there are specific time factors involved in reporting claims
- Questions for the Board of Commissioners:

- Would like to request additional staff for the HR Department if possible
- Would like to request a closed session

Chairman Morris noted that there would definitely be a closed session at the end of the senior work sessions and request for additional staff should be included in the department budget request to the county manager.

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

Commissioner Cox commented:

- Have some questions, but believe there are several things that need to be discussed in closed session – maybe add a closed session today if possible
- Questioned how the exit interviews are being done

Director Tucker responded:

- Employees submit a resignation letter to their department head
- Department head completes a personnel action form that is forwarded to HR at which time an exit interview is scheduled with the employee who is leaving
- During the exit interview, all benefits that apply to each employee are discussed such as termination of health/dental insurance, what will be paid out on the last check such as comp. time, vacation, etc. along with any questions the employee might have

Commissioner Cox noted that during the exit interview would be a good time to get a lot of information about employee turnover and what the problems are.

Commissioner Cox confirmed with Director Tucker that information regarding why someone is leaving is obtained during the exit interview if provided by the employee.

Director Tucker noted that some employees just leave without having an exit interview.

Commissioner Cox continued:

- Confirmed with Director Tucker that benefit providers are considered in January/February of each year (meetings include county manager and assistant county manager)
- Questioned how competitive is that process regarding cost, benefits being offered, etc.

HR Assistant Clark responded:

- All the brokers are basically going to come back with the same health care coverage costs because they all price it out to the same groups being the county is self-insured
- The thing that changes is their base rate per employee
- That rate is determined on the number of services they provide to help HR

Director Tucker responded:

- They can sound really good this year and then the next year go up

Manager Shaver added:

- For instance, we were paying \$22 with the current broker we were under and now we are down to \$13 now for the base rate

Commissioner Wood requested additional information on the department's duties involving the payroll system.

Assistant HR Director Clark explained what the department keys into the payroll system such as setting up a new employee, terminating an existing employee, longevity, on call pay, new benefits, etc.

Commissioner Cox questioned if all that paperwork could be automated in some way.

HR Director Tucker noted the new software will include the employee portal which should eliminate some of the paperwork.

Commissioner Wood confirmed with Director Tucker that the county has a vacation roll over policy that allows employees to roll over unused vacation leave at the end of each calendar year to sick leave – eliminating unused vacation over a certain maximum amount from being lost.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Confirmed with Director Tucker that HR did not do the background checks on new hires and that each individual department is responsible for making sure the applicant provides a background check that is obtained from the Clerk of Court's Office (applicant has to provide a background check from the county and/or counties in which they have resided in for the past five years)

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Need to have a discussion on a future agenda regarding background checks
- Need to also have a system where driver's licenses are checked to make sure they are not suspended, revoked, etc. (it can't just be a policy that we have, but is never done)
- It is even worse when you have policies and they are not implemented
- I know there are different opinions on this Board, but my stance is that when an employee gets promoted to a supervisor position from an entry level, there needs to be a criminal background check done
- I know we are in a smaller county, and everyone knows everything that is going on, but sometimes you could have an employee in Myrtle Beach that gets into trouble that the county never finds out about
- Confirmed with HR Director Tucker that the department receives an annual report detailing by department the number and kind of workmen's comp incidents – does not include solutions to recurring incidents but most claims go before the accident review board to try to alleviate future incidents
- Confirmed with HR Director Tucker that the department receives information regarding terminated employees who are filing for unemployment and that cases are contested if someone resigns and tries to receive benefits; other cases are handled on a case-by-case basis

- Would like to see a program implemented where all new hires can come to a designated orientation period explaining all new benefits, completing all required paperwork, etc.
- Believe a scheduled orientation program would free up a lot of time for the department
- Currently, we have an HR director and an assistant HR director with the director spending so much time keying information into the system that the director does not have time to look to the future for professional development, orientation training, etc.
- This is not cutting edge, this is something that should be very, very ingrained already in our culture, this could take care of so many of our problems

Chairman Morris commented:

- Have been in the military and other organizations that have two components of staff - a central staff such as HR/Administration and an operating staff such as EMS, Sheriff, DSS, etc.
- In everyone that I have been in, there has always been conflict between the central staff and the operational staff which is not unusual
- Feel this can be correct through policy corrections and increased communications for the most part which is what I think the Board is talking about
- HR is just like IT – two-person department
- Feel this Board is willing to look at what changes need to be made within our affordability limits
- Currently making some small changes – relocating HR to a bigger office space for privacy
- What like to see the turnover rate for last year to see if the last salary study has played any part in the turnover rate
- Confirmed with Assistant HR Director Clark that the 140 resignations last year did include part time EMS employees who did not work the required number of hours to remain on the part time active list
- Discussed needed continuing education for the department
- Confirmed with Assistant HR Director Clark that the department does have goals to move the county forward but there is just not enough time
- Would like to see how many employees other HR departments have in similar counties
- Discussed the previous salary study which changed from using steps to percentages

County Manager Shaver noted the following

- The idea of the recent salary study was to get the minimum to such a point that the minimum would be attractive enough to get people to come to Stokes County to work
- The manager, in talking to department heads, would have the authority to go all the way to midpoint of that grade if needed to get an experienced person to come to Stokes County
- No other details were included in the salary study

Chairman Morris continued:

- Confirmed with Manager Shaver that the study looked at education and experience to develop the individual grades and that there was no information given on how to hire a

person other than the manager being able to go to midpoint without coming to the Board for approval

Vice Chairman Chandler commented:

- Have to be sure and look at starting someone above the entry level that would be making more than someone who has been here 10+ years – creates morale issues

Chairman Morris continued:

- Believe education and communicate with employees could help alleviate some of the issues such as reporting worker's comp claims
- Confirmed with HR Director Tucker that the purchase of high-priced stretchers has reduced back injuries for EMS workers

Chairman Morris questioned if the process being used to determine broker benefits was working.

County Manager Shaver commented:

- County does not put out a specific proposal each year for broker benefits
- We have had people come and offer their broker services and normally it was not better than what we already had
- Last year was different with the passing of Mr. Dunn who handled the broker services
- Allowed anyone who wanted to come and provide us details about their services
- Normally, the health insurance is the same due to being self-funded
- There has not been a formal bid process

Chairman Morris continued:

- Confirmed with HR Director Tucker that the department is very satisfied with the current broker

Chairman Morris questioned if there were any other follow up questions for HR.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Would like to know the rationale of why the employees are leaving such as salary, distance traveling to work, better offer, working conditions, etc. and how many of each reason

Vice Chairman Chandler requested how many grievances/complaints does the county receive each year.

Chairman Morris noted that the need to try to figure out a way to really make the exit interview work – hopefully getting the employee to let us know why they are leaving so we can try to fix issues.

HR Director Tucker responded that the department does have an exit interview questionnaire, some employees will complete while others do not want any part of it.

HR Director Tucker expressed appreciation for allowing departments to come and speak directly to the Board.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, Chairman Morris entertained a motion to recess the meeting until Tuesday, January 24, 2023 at 9:00 am.

Commissioner Mendenhall moved to recess the meeting until Tuesday, January 24, 2023 at 9:00 am. Vice Chairman Chandler seconded and the motion passed unanimously.



Amber Brown
Clerk to the Board



Rick Morris
Chairman