MINUTES
Board of County Commissioners Meeting
Monday, May 10, 2021 4:00 PM
Pender County Public Assembly Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: George Brown
Fred McCoy
Jacqueline A. Newton
David Piepmeyer
David Williams

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: Chad McEwen, County Manager
Trey Thurman, County Attorney
Nancy Avery, Interim Clerk to the Board
Doug Shipley, Assistant County Manager
Allen Vann, Assistant County Manager
Other Staff and Members of the Press and Public.

1 CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Brown called budget session # 2 to order at 4 pm. A quorum of the board was present.

2 ELECTIONS

Department Head Susan Williams deferred to County Manager McEwen who stated:

- Recommended budget is higher than requested
- Budget fluctuates based on whether it is during an election year or not
- Largest increase was in postage for mailings to voters for better educational outreach

Commissioner Newton asked why $11,000 was recommended for training instead of $18,000 requested.
Manager McEwen responded that since even thought we are coming out of pandemic there is still a lack of opening for off site training.

3 TAX ADMINISTRATION

Tax Department Head Justian Pound said:

- Current year collection rate is 93% for this fiscal year
- There is one more round of collection strategies to do
- Delinquent notices coming out soon in the newspaper
- Hoping to increase tax collection rate to 96%
- Purchase for public portal to view tax cards is included in this budget to bring a lot of transparency
- Loss of two extra positions made it less feasible to open off-site location in Hampstead
- There is office space available but the biggest issue is money protocols and collection of cash
- Trying not to add additional work load to staff that is not associated with taxes in trying to answer questions.

Commissioner Newton asked why did you do away with advertising budget.
Mr. Pound replied that it was moved to attorney and legal fees budget because notices are legally required.

Commissioner Piepmeyer asked if salary increases are due to salary study.
Manager McEwen responded yes.

Commissioner Piepmeyer asked why is there underspending on training? Are you doing cross training in office?
Mr. Pound said because of Covid 19, the Department Of Resources put hold on a lot of training last year. It will move to on-line this next year.

4 REGISTER OF DEEDS

Department Head Sharon Willoughby stated:

- Budget is just like last year, except for computer upgrade from desk tops to laptops
- Renovations are about 95% complete
- Requests for passports has not decreased during pandemic
- We only stopped issuing them because NC State shut down accepting applications

Commissioner Newton asked why the conveyance tax is going up so much.
Finance Department Head Blue replied it was based on percentage of revenue collected

Commissioner Piepmeyer asked how many staff are in the office?
Ms. Willoughby responded it depends on passports and we are slammed.
There is no space really for additional staff.

5 PENDER COUNTY SCHOOLS

Dr. Steven Hill handed out a presentation. Highlights are:

- 18 schools, 6 preK sites, PreK – grade 13 with enrollment of 9,857 students
- Received accolades from NC Department of Trust in how they handled Covid 19
- Growing tremendously in general population at 21 percent. Pender is tied with Mecklenburg county
- Growth is younger families with children, not retirees
- There is an increase in military presence
- Teacher retainage percentage is increasing since the supplement 2019-2020 at 12.9 percent
- Want to purchase pod with six rooms to launch mental health aspect. This provides a location where students can receive education and mental health assistance. It will combine with the STAR program to help deal with suicide, depression, anxiety etc.
- They are now taking money from public schools to help fund Charter schools
- We lose students but still have to fund a slot. Competing state legislation is causing problems.

Commissioner Piepmeyer said the county budgeted $22 million last year or about $2300 per student. The highest percent of tax revenue goes to the schools. He asked how much funding was received from state and federal government last year.
Dr. Hill answered $900 per student for all.

Board Consensus – want to see trend for federal and state funding over last 10 years.

6 BREAK

Chairman Brown called for a break at 6:01 pm and resumed the meeting at 6:28 pm.

7 HEALTH | DSS

DSS Manager Wes Stuart stated:

- Tried to be conscious about expenditures
- Made some reduction in foster care line by $1 million
- Numbers have been going down probably some due to Covid
- We are doing better job of keeping families together
- That’s the biggest cost savings for DSS
- Increase in budget is related to IT disbursed costs

- There is $50,000 budgeted to automate Laserfiche to track when a report was called in, how long it took to respond, reminders to workers, etc. instead of using excel spreadsheets
- Also asking for increase for four new cars to replace current ones
- Recommended and requested amounts are close, any increase is due to salary study
- Doing better with retention of staff with less turnover

Chairman Brown thanked Mr. Stuart for the great job he is doing.

Health Department Head Carolyn Moser said:

- Before salary study added to budget, the initial request was $107,000 less than last year
- We have been able to earn more revenue with use of Covid carryover money
- There have been additional revenues in Medicaid, 4 percent more because of Covid
- Salary study plus fringe is $184,000
- Short 2 nurses right now. We get applicants but they refuse because of the pay
- We have lost two new nutritionists
- Cost settlement funds $4.5 million for new building
- Due to receive $650,000 also
- Manager cut budget and took $650,000 from cost settlement. We want to leave it there
- We are returning more than enough but cost settlement money is being taken away
- Estimating $22 million for a new building. Some costs can be funded through DSS

8 ITS

Department Head Erik Harvey stated

- Project accomplished this year is that service desk is up and running to do better on project management.
- This was put in place in March. It is much better tool that can track tickets and who assigned to. Previous method was through phone calls. Technicians are now also able to report how long the job is taking. Would be comfortable with reporting after accumulating a year's information.

9 SHERIFF | JAIL | ANIMAL CONTROL

Sheriff Cutler stated:

- Appreciates the salary study and 100% supports it because it will be beneficial for morale and retention
- We have 100 budgeted positions and probably 10% openings
- Process of replacing passenger cars with SUVs for patrols
- Last staff increase in 911 center was 2007
- Average 105,901 calls year over past 5 years
- Also answer municipalities phone lines after hours, weekends, holidays etc. with no funding
- He plans to meet with them to discuss this

Commissioner Piepmeyer asked if he knows by municipality the cost for these services. If not, it would be good to have before he starts the conversations.

Sheriff Cutler said:

- He has four telecommunicators working each shift, including supervisor on day shift
- Response time is:
  Area 1 – 20:35 minutes
  Area 2 – 21.42 minutes
  Area 3 – 24.59 minutes
  Area 4 – 17.24 minutes
  Area 5 – 17:30 minutes
- The jail operates with three detention officers on duty at a time
- During the day, shifts may have four
- They can’t leave posts so there is no one to assist if an altercation happens which makes Burgaw Police Department as first response
- Rapidly growing county and sheriff’s office staffing has not grown to keep up
- Future costs may be impacted by legislation and need to update emergency equipment that is outdated
- We need at least 30 more cameras to equip all officers
- Each officer is assigned a camera
- Asking for additional staff of four telecommunicators and 2 full time supervisors needed in 911
- There are only dispatchers at night and we need a supervisor for staff to go to at night
- For the 911 center to maintain service and law enforcement, the console needs to be split for two dispatch channels
- State pays for 911 equipment, not salaries but will reimburse for training
- No additional staff since 2004
- Increase in calendared court sessions of 43.15%
- 29.41% over past 5 years and 85% since 2004
- Have three dedicated baliff positions

- Three people can't cover, so having to off set need for more by using courthouse security
- Should be two baliffs in courtroom

Chairman Brown asked what positions were requested.
County Manager responded six positions; four telecommunicators and 2 shift leaders. He recommended two telecommunicator positions and one shift leader. There are four supervisors on day shift now and he does not think that is necessary. Asked sheriff to consider putting one shift leader on night shift because he did not think there was huge enough spike in last year to warrant six positions.

Chief Deputy Collier explained:

- There are 12 positions for courthouse security to cover all courtrooms and courthouses we are having to cover
- Asking for sworn officer to handle the Juris Link
- Requesting one additional baliff
- Not requesting any additional staff for security
- Requesting new position for CSI /General Investigator. This was recommended by the manager.
- There are five areas for patrol and each deputy is responsible for 10,510 citizens. This does not include tourists
- Laundry position would be civilian position
- Have discussed making Animal Control sworn positions as openings become available to provide more flexibility for the calls they can handle if position is sworn officer. Better for back up needs.

Commissioner comments:
Commissioner Piepmeyer asked how much it would cost for the 12 positions requested.
Finance Officer Blue answered $900,000.

Commissioner Williams asked if it is mandated when body cams must be on.
Sheriff answered yes, we require it. It has been a learning process and there have been some disciplinary actions.

Commissioner Newton asked if there is there a way to activate cameras remotely, maybe from dispatch.
Sheriff Cutler replied no, but our equipment engages if the blue light, taser or single side arm is deployed.

Chairman Brown asked if he is asking for patrol officers. How many new employees is he requesting.

County Manager McEwen responded the Sheriff is asking for 12 new employees and he recommend four.

Commissioner Piepmeyer asked what the financial impact would be to add two more. He would like to meet Sheriff half way with six new positions. Like to consider giving the Sheriff $450,000 more and let him allocate as he sees fit.

Commissioner Williams says he thinks he hears a consensus to give six of the requested positions, rather than four.

Chairman Brown said he is okay with having that discussion but he wants further conversation.

Commissioner Newton asked is there any grant money or state contribution that could be used if county paid for 911 equipment?
The Sheriff replied that grant money is available for School Resource officers and bullet proof vests, radio equipment.

Commissioner McCoy stated he wants to see bottom line. He wants to do as much as we can for Sheriff's department, but wants to see bottom line impact.

Sheriff asked County Manager McEwen to talk about the jail project.
Manager McEwen said we may need to hire someone to help with USDA funding process. We will need to have architectural drawings and need the Board to say up or down. We have spent $25 – 30,000 on due process. We got the land for free. The Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for design services is prepared. The Board needs to oaky submittal. It was talked about in retreat but there has been no formal vote.

Commissioner Williams said we are at the point where we need to spend money or stop talking about it.
Commissioner Newton said she is ready to commit.

Chairman Brown said he wanted to wait on this decision until budget process finished because there are other requests that we need to prioritize. He agrees we need to move forward on the jail but needs to know where money is coming from.

Finance Officer Blue said $1.4 million has been set aside.

10 WRAP UP DISCUSSION

Moved by David Piepmeyer, seconded by Jacqueline A. Newton

Adjourn 8:31 pm

	For	**Against**	**Abstained**	**Absent**
George Brown	x			
Fred McCoy	x			
Jacqueline A. Newton	x			
David Piepmeyer	x			
David Williams	x			
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CARRIED.