**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**

**FEBRUARY 19, 2019**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a special meeting with the Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors and staff on Tuesday, February 19, 2019 at 12:00 Noon at the Pineapple Café.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Jeff Dixon, Chairman

Frankie Meads

Charles H. Jordan

Sean Lavin

Barry Overman

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Lloyd E. Griffin, III

Cecil Perry

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Sparty Hammett, County Manager

R. Michael Cox, County Attorney

Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board

Sheri Small, Finance Officer

Steve Harris, Pasquotank SWCD Chairman

Maurice Berry, Pasquotank SWCD Supervisor, Treasurer

Dwane Hinson, Pasquotank SWCD Technician

Brian Lannon, Camden SWCD Technician/District Administrator

Mark Powell, Program & Project Management Consultant,

Albemarle RC&D

Rodney Johnson, Albemarle RC&D

Doug Wassum, NRCS District Conservationist

Cathy Smith, Pasquotank SWCD District Administrator

Steve Harris, Pasquotank Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Chairman, welcomed everyone. He gave the invocation and lunch was served.

Following lunch, SWCD Technician Dwane Hinson said today he would like to address drainage issues and water quality issues, as well as some mechanisms they would like to suggest to the Board. He said additionally he would touch on solar fields, windmills, swamp forest clearcutting, and water quality monitoring programs.

Mr. Hinson asked the Board to consider a new community based mechanism for solving drainage problems. He said it can be a collaborative effort between the County Government, RC&D, Soil & Water, NCDOT, and private landowners. They would like to do projects on a watershed scale, because the problems cannot be solved by dealing with just single landowners.

Currently, they are working on drainage issues in the Sutton Creek-Little River. The partners include nine property owners, Perquimans Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), and Albemarle Resource Conservation & Development Council (ARC&D). He explained that the ditches in the community are clogged with debris and sediment. Ditches from the community to the Little River are grown over with trees and shrubs. He said their strategy is for the community to help clean out ditches that are accessible with a small excavator. DOT will clean out one ditch. A contractor will be used to clear and snag the ditches that run to the Little River. The Perquimans SWCD and ARC&D will provide technical and administrative support to the project. ARC&D will hire him to assist with the project.

Mr. Hinson proposed that the County consider providing $35,000 - $50,000 in “seed funds” to basically allow them to get RC&D involved. He noted that RC&D has expertise in permitting, getting grants, and coordinating collaborative efforts, and SWCD can do the technical work. With an effort like this, they can utilize County money, cost share programs, and NCDOT funds. They need the County’s help because they will be working with private landowners. He said that is why they suggested the County have special use water management districts a while back. It gives the community a chance to have input and control of what is going on. He noted that they cannot go on private property without permission. Project prioritization will be based on many factors, such as soil and water districts, County Commissioners input, and whatever community is ready to move forward first. In the past, projects were prioritized by “where they could get grants to improve water quality for”.

Mr. Powell stated that RC&D has been collaborating with counties and SWCDs for many years. Ten or twelve years ago the council collaborated with all the counties to develop countywide water management plans. As part of that effort, it addressed revising the stormwater ordinances to take into account all of the issues that Mr. Hinson has raised. He said this is a good model because it includes people in the community themselves. They will be committing time and resources to the project. He said that goes a long way. He noted that it is also a good mechanism to get NCDOT involved to help with their ditches and right-of-ways.

Mr. Hinson stated that construction of solar fields and windmill projects usually result in land use disturbance over many acres, especially considering road and drainage system disturbance associated with accessing isolated construction sites. The nutrients and sediment released during this process usually end up in the ditch water of the watershed drainage system. These excess nutrients usually produce algal blooms in the drainage systems. He said these blooms have been traced moving through the downstream creeks and rivers to the Albemarle Sound. Uncontrolled and unfiltered drainage systems play a significant role in the occurrence of algal blooms. Conservation practices have been developed for farm drainage systems to remove some of the excess nutrients from drainage water. He said the County needs to change some of their special condition permits to include drainage maintenance easements, drainage systems in wetlands, water control structures, rock drop structures, and drainage improvements. He feels the developers need to contribute to improving the watershed and addressing the water quality issues.

Mr. Powell said another problem they face is there are not enough water quality monitors in northeastern North Carolina. There is one on the Perquimans River, one on the Little River, and one on the Pasquotank River. Enough data is not being picked up to tell them enough about water quality. He said there is one DQ monitoring station in Woodville at Old 17 that has been collecting data since 1977. From DQ analysis of the data, we know that the Little River is a hotspot for phosphorus, which has been increasing for the last thirty years. They know also that it is a hotspot for organic nitrogen, which has been increasing for the last twenty years. There is a seven mile section of the Little River listed as impaired for Chlorophyll A, which means it is getting too many nutrients.

Rodney Johnson said in 2017, we had a bad algal bloom, down through Nixonton and Dances Bay to Simmons Creek. They were able to use some leftover Clean Water Management trust funds from a project they had to pay for running samples. He said he volunteered some of the Green $aves Green group members to take his boat to collect core samples in the river in Hall Creek, Nixonton Bay, Dances Bay, and the mouth of Simmons Creek. Then, they would go by truck and pick up three samples towards the Dismal Swamp. The samples were sent to the lab three times this summer. Luckily, there was not a bloom this summer as previously. They want to stay ahead of it, and more stations along the river would help tremendously. He would like to see eight sampling points on the Little River. He noted that it needs to be done on the Pasquotank River as well. He said he volunteers and does not charge anything for his gas or time. He will continue to do so as long as he is able to. There is a need for resources to help do samples on the Pasquotank as well. Mr. Hinson said they would like the County to consider setting aside some money in their budget this year to add some resources for monitoring programs to help with water quality. Mr. Powell noted that there are many people who are really interested in helping with this effort. He added that they will be pushing the state for more support from DEQ and their monitoring department.

Mr. Hinson said the next thing he would like to address is the possibility of the County assisting them with some legislative packages. He would like to set up a meeting with some of our representatives to discuss the Albemarle Areas special needs and the possibility of getting some kind of legislative help to go towards our issues/problems.

Mr. Hinson stated that swamp logging has been an issue for a long time. He understands the importance of logging, but we have got to have some changes. Currently, there are virtually no buffer rules and they are inadequate to protect our drainage. He said they think the water quality aspects are associated, to some degree, with the amount of organic nitrogen and the churning of the organic soils in the floodplain that enters the water column and gradually develops into algal blooms. There is too much debris being left in the swamps and creeks. He would like to propose some type of legislative package requiring at least a 100’ buffer. They need help offsetting some of the costs.

Doug Wassum stated that the USDA has had the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program since 1999 or 2000, but not all river basins have been eligible. In the last eight or ten years, it has become available to all river basins in North Carolina. He said they are looking at securing easements on eligible cropland and the adjacent contiguous woodland. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program was solely designed to protect or improve water quality. They are looking into qualifying water bodies, floodplains, rivers, ditches, and so forth and taking cropland back from the water bodies to widen the buffers. They will be offering ten, fifteen, or thirty permanent easements and there are different monetary values they place on purchasing the easements, but there needs to be eligible cropland adjacent to a water body to qualify. The interesting thing is now they look at a 10.1 ratio. For every one acre of cropland, they are looking at obtaining an additional ten riparian acres. Mr. Hinson explained that if you go along a 20’ edge, 200’ wide, which is equivalent to about an acre, he can project the ten acres with a payment as much as $1,000 an acre to the waterbody. He said that is a significant alternative. They are trying to get landowners involved. He feels we will experience real improvement in our drainage situation, but also in water quality. He said they may call on the County later as they develop these packages to use their political clout to talk to legislatures.

Mr. Hinson said years ago the Division of Water Quality had monies that RC&D would get for grants to address debris removal. They had good access to the grants in Northeastern North Carolina. Those funds are no longer available. They would like to get another legislative package which allows them to go in and get monies to clear debris out of our streams. He explained that clearing and snagging needs to happen at least every five years or sooner if we experience a hurricane.

Maurice Berry thanked the Board for allowing them to hire a full-time administrative assistant.

Steve Harris said he believes maintenance is the key component to drainage. He thinks our county is 20-30 years behind the times. When development boomed in the 80’s, farmers sold off their road frontage. NCDOT did not have specifications for pipe sizes at that time. Now there are many pipes that are too small and they have never been replaced. He said the DOT would be doing themselves a favor by improving drainage. Roads would last a lot longer. He said if we work together and have a plan, we can get a lot more help. As individuals, it is impossible. He asked that the Board include money in their budget so that when a project does come up there will be funds available.

Chairman Dixon thanked the Soil & Water Conservation supervisors and staff for their update and for the lunch that was provided. The meeting was adjourned at 1:51 PM.

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CHAIRMAN

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CLERK TO THE BOARD