**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA FEBRUARY 26, 2021**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners held a retreat on Friday, February 26, 2021 at the Foreman Center, at College of the Albemarle, 1208 N. Road Street, Elizabeth City, N.C.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Lloyd E. Griffin, III, Chairman

Charles Jordan, Vice-Chairman

Cecil Perry

Barry Overman

Sean Lavin

Bill Sterritt

Jonathan Meads

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

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

R. Michael Cox, County Attorney

Sheri Small, Finance Officer

Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board

Hartley Askew, Deputy Clerk to the Board

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 AM by Chairman Lloyd Griffin. Commissioner Cecil Perry gave the invocation and County Attorney Mike Cox led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**1. FY2020-21 GOALS UPDATE:**

County Manager Sparty Hammett provided the following FY2020-21 Goals Update:

**Parks and Recreation**

Prior to extending the Parks and Recreation Interlocal Agreement (IA), amend number 7 of the IA titled “Advisory Board” to “Parks and Recreation Board:” change the composition of the Board; add the County Manager and City Manager as ex officio members; and strengthen the function/authority of the Board.

**Status:** City Council approved the change to a Parks and Recreation Advisory Board at the Joint City-County meeting in November. The revised Interlocal Agreement will have to be approved by the City Council and Board of Commissioners and will be effective for 5-years starting July 1, 2021. Per discussion with the City Manager, we will start the process of the transition to a P&R Board at the March 2021 P&R Advisory Board meeting.

**FY20-21 Budget**

Develop a no tax increase budget.

**Status:** Completed.

Address Employee Compensation, Sheriff’s Office staffing needs and Volunteer Fire Services within the FY20-21 Budget.

**Status:** Completed.

**Fire Services**

Pass Resolution – “Encouraging Businesses to Allow Volunteer Firefighters to Respond to Emergency Calls During Working Hours.”

**Status:** Completed.

Identify funding in the Fiscal Year 2020-21 Budget to implement stipends for Volunteer Firefighters.

**Status:** Completed.

Conduct a Work Session on December 7, 2020, to discuss the recommended negotiation of the Fire Service contract with Elizabeth City.

**Status:** Board approved sending a letter to the City beginning the Fire Service contract negotiation.

**Planning and Inspections**

Finalize street condition assessments and notify property owners/developers of their subdivision’s status and maintenance options.

**Status:** This has not been completed to-date.

Begin developing a plan to address future growth for the Newland area.

**Status:** This will be included in the County’s Comprehensive Plan which was funded in the 2020-2021 Budget. Staff has applied for a grant that would help pay for a portion of the Comprehensive Plan and we will be notified in April if the grant will be awarded. Once we receive this notification, we will proceed with the development of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Information Technology**

Continue to identify funding in the FY20-21 Budget to expand GPS tracking for non-Public Safety vehicles*.*

**Status:** GPS units have been added to Planning & Inspections vehicles.

Continue to expand the use of new technology based on cost versus benefits and funding availability.

**Status:** Major enhancements of technology have already been completed in FY2020-21 including: Planning and Inspections online permitting software; new Courthouse complex phone system; and Emergency Operations Center upgrade.

**Utilities Department**

Continue with the plan to address the Reverse Osmosis wellfield issues, including completion of the retrofit of all existing wells with variable frequency drives and identification of sites for new wells.

**Status:** All existing wells have been retrofitted with variable frequency drives and new pumps.

Finalize Water and Sewer Master Plan and begin implementing recommendations, based on funding availability.

**Status:** Water and Sewer Master Plan was finalized in September, and we have started implementing recommendations.

**Sheriff’s Office**

Continue to work with the Sheriff to help achieve his goals for the future direction of the department to address crime.

**Status:** Two Deputies were added using COPS grants and one School Resource Officer was added at NEAAAT. Body Cameras for officers were also implemented.

**Countywide Drainage**

Work through the Drainage Advisory Committee to begin addressing countywide drainage and water quality issues.

**Status:** Countywide Drainage Committee was implemented in August, and we just completed the fourth bi-monthly meeting.

Attempt to establish a Drainage District in the desert.

**Status:** Drainage Committee members are continuing to work toward establishing the Desert Drainage District.

Identify funding in the FY2020-21 budget for another project for addressing public drainage concerns.

**Status:** Completed – drainage funding was increased from $40,000 in FY2019-20 to $60,000 in FY2020-21.

**Lobbyist/Legislative**

Follow-up monthly with our Lobbyist to ensure support of both the NCACC’s legislative goals and Pasquotank County’s local goals.

**Status:** Completed to-date.

Schedule two Board presentations for our Lobbyist to provide legislative updates and updates on their efforts in pursuing the County’s legislative goals.

**Status:** Completed at Retreat.

**Economic Development**

Pursue industrial site certification for the Pasquotank County Commerce Park through Electricities and the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

**Status:** Consultants completed the study, but the Commerce Park could not be certified due to sewer capacity concerns.

Engage with speculative builders to promote the Pasquotank County Commerce Park for a potential shell building partnership.

**Status:** No progress to-date.

Gain site control of all, or a portion of the Tanglewood Megasite through a public-private partnership to promote the site for economic development purposes.

**Status:** Information was submitted to all property owners and video meetings have been held with some owners.

**Other Goals**

Initiate annual community meetings for staff to convey information to citizens and to answer questions.

**Status:** Community meetings have not been conducted due to COVID-19.

Develop a plan to establish permanent Board meeting space.

**Status:** A plan has been developed which will be discussed in the Capital Projects section of the Retreat.

Continue process of updating and codifying county ordinances.

**Status:** The County Attorney’s Office is working on updating and codifying county ordinances.

**2. 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

County Manager Sparty Hammett provided the following FY2020-21 Accomplishments Update:

**Countywide – Response to COVID-19**

Pasquotank County was open for business as usual during COVID-19, with the exception of March 31st to May 8th during Governor Cooper’s Stay at Home Order when we operated by appointment only.  In comparison, many North Carolina cities and counties shut government offices down for months and many continue to have modified operations. All Pasquotank County employees have done an incredible job of continuing to perform their work duties and taking efforts to stay safe. To-date, we have had no outbreaks of COVID-19 in the Pasquotank County workplace.

**Maintenance Department – Response to COVID-19**

The Maintenance Department was extremely busy during 2020, as the department played a major role in enabling the County to continue near normal operations. The Department built many permanent and temporary shields in County buildings to help protect employees and the public. Custodial staff also had to intensify the level of cleaning to address COVID-19. The Maintenance Department adapted quickly and learned more efficient ways of keeping County buildings safer such as the Electrostatic Sprayer that will aid the County into the future.

**Countywide – Small Business and Nonprofit Grant Programs**

Pasquotank County businesses and nonprofits were hit hard by the shutdowns and restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This was not something that any business or entity could plan for - the suddenness of it, nor the continued longevity of it. The Board of Commissioners knew it could potentially have a devastating impact on our community from both an economic and a well-being perspective, which is why you immediately committed to doing whatever you could in support and to alleviate some of the immediate needs.

The $370,000 initial allocation of funding for the grant programs was substantial ($250,000 for Small Business Grant Program and $120,000 for the Nonprofit Grant Program).  The County was able to provide grant funding for 102 small businesses and 26 nonprofits.

**Countywide – Sentara Lease Buyout**

The Sentara Lease Buyout was approved by the Board on November 16th . The commitment by Sentara to invest $158 million in a new state-of-the-art hospital on the County’s major commercial corridor will have a significant impact on healthcare and will aide future economic development efforts.

The Board will eventually be able to consider options for redevelopment of the existing hospital site which may include a public/private partnership to spur development along the Road Street Corridor. The existing hospital site will present an excellent redevelopment opportunity for the location of a mixed use, waterfront development. The property’s size and location along North Road Street provides a unique opportunity to revitalize the northern entryway into Elizabeth City.

**Countywide – Former Elizabeth City Middle School Project – Pending Sale**

The Board accepted an offer of $420,000 from J.D. Lewis Construction Management, Inc. for the former Elizabeth City Middle School (ECMS) property and the upset bid process cleared in November. JDL is currently completing the due diligence process.

This project can be a big **Win** for both the City and the County:

* Having the former ECMS privately owned makes it taxable, whereas there is currently no tax revenue generated.
* JDL’s plan to renovate the site into 70 to 84 apartments would increase the downtown population, meaning more spending and more sales tax revenue.
* The actual construction cost will be in the millions – well over $5 probably – which has a multiplier effect for the local economy – job creation, economic spending, etc.

**Countywide – Logo/Brand Developed**

Bizzell Design was retained in May of 2020 to conduct the Branding Study. A 9-person Branding Committee was formed to work with Bizzell Design in developing the County Brand/Logo. The Committee made a final decision in December and the Board adopted the Brand in January. The Brand/Logo will be used on vehicles, uniforms, stationary, and business cards, etc. We will start the process of working with Buzz Bizzell to develop a Brand Rollout/Implementation Plan next week.

**Central Communications – Martin County Backup Center Activated and Transition to ESInet**

* Central moved their equipment into the Martin County Backup Center and tested the system twice.
* Completed the cutover at the primary and backup centers to the Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet) in September 2020. The North Carolina 911 Board contracted with AT&T to develop ESInet to vastly improve the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency response.

**Cooperative Extension** **– Online and Virtual Programming Developed**

Cooperative Extension developed online educational programs across all program areas, continuing to meet the needs of our citizens.  The Pasquotank CES YouTube Channel was created. Staff created and shared 60 educational videos which received 1,709 views.  In addition, the 4-H Youth EFNEP educator hosted a total of 21 virtual meetings with school aged youth. The Adult EFNEP educator graduated 150 people who completed the EFNEP nutrition series. 4-H provided materials for virtual summer camp, club meetings and school enrichment projects, with 530 youth increasing their knowledge of STEM and 650 youth increasing knowledge of life skills.  The FCS department developed new partnerships with community agencies, reaching 170 individuals through virtual nutrition education programs. The Pesticide certification classes and tests were provided virtually, delivering 260 continuing education credits to 132 farmers/landscape professionals.

**County Attorney’s Office – Updating and Codifying Ordinances**

* The County Attorney’s Office is working on updating and codifying county ordinances.  All of the print copies of ordinances have been updated except Planning and Zoning.
* Provided assistance with all ongoing major County projects.

**Board of Elections – 2020 Elections Success**

* Successfully administered the biggest election in Pasquotank County history.
* Accomplished a move in one-stop locations that successfully voted over 13,000 Pasquotank residents without any known COVID-19 breakouts.
* Handled a massive spike in Absentee-by-mails, from 494 in 2016 to 4,500 in 2020.

**Emergency Management – Emergency Operations Center Upgrade**

We used Coronavirus Relief Funds to update our Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The project included purchasing new monitors, computers, and a SMART board that can be used as a whiteboard or projection screen. We also partnered with Elizabeth City Police Department and developed an agreement to utilize their traffic cameras in the EOC as well. These technological improvements moved the County forward in being able to provide up-to-date information while also monitoring the various State websites during an activation.

**Emergency Management – Emergency Operations Center Dashboard**

Emergency Management (EM) partnered with the GIS departments from Camden, Pasquotank, and Elizabeth City to create an Emergency Operations Dashboard. This dashboard showcases real-time impacts and information about hazards that could affect county citizens, businesses, and visitors. Tabs include but are not limited to: Weather; Hurricane Tracking; Know Your Zone; Evacuations; Traffic; Power Outage Maps; Gas Availability; Trash/Debris Pick-up; and Important Contacts. The dashboard was released for use in 2020, and EM will continue to improve it in the future.

**Emergency Management – Civil Unrest Tabletop Exercise**

Utilizing an exercise grant from NCEM, EM conducted a Civil Unrest Tabletop Exercise on July 7th at COA. Participating partners included representatives from City and County Administration, Pasquotank and Camden Sheriff’s Offices, Elizabeth City Police Department, Elizabeth City Fire Department, Pasquotank-Camden EMS, NC State Highway Patrol, and NC EM.

During the after-action review following this exercise, it was determined that law enforcement agencies in Pasquotank, Camden, and Elizabeth City were inadequately equipped with the proper protective gear to handle a civil unrest event without calling for additional assistance from other jurisdictions. Through the assistance of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, 20 sets of civil unrest gear were secured with the Pasquotank Sheriff’s Office and Elizabeth City Police Department receiving 10 sets each; Camden Sheriff’s Office had already procured some gear.

**Emergency Medical Services – Expansion of Community Partnership Paramedicine Program (CPPP)**

* + An additional Community Paramedic was added to help with post overdose follow up and post-discharge patient follow-up and education. This position was transferred to CPPP through a reorganization of PCEMS, no additional funding was required.
  + Pasquotank-Camden CPPP joined with the Wellcare of North Carolina Medicaid Program to begin participating in first-ever reimbursements for Community Paramedicine Services in North Carolina.

**Finance Office** **– Standard and Poor’s Credit Rating Increase**

In March of 2020, the County’s rating for the certificates of participation (COPS) issue were upgraded from A to A+.  This is one notch below the rating for General Obligation (GO) debt, which increased to AA-. The ratings help determine the interest rates at which the county borrows money.  The better the credit ratings, the lower the interest rate the county pays.

**Fire Departments – Unsafe Houses Burned and Success of Stipends**

* Volunteer Fire Departments burned the following houses to help rid the county of blight:

Providence VFD: 721A Creek Road

                         721B Creek Road

                             725 Creek Road

Newland VFD: 1513 Millpond Road

                             1462 Lambs Grove Road

                          538 Crooked Run Road

Weeksville VFD: 461 New Road

                              419 Meadstown Road

* $10 Stipend - Pay per call:  When we analyzed the response data from July 1, 2019 through January 1, 2020 and July 1, 2020 through January 1, 2021, the call responses increased by an average of 27.4%.

**GIS Department – Next Generation 911 Compliance Achieved and Tax Ownership Books Placed Online**

* Our GIS data was normalized and uploaded to the state’s Next Generation 911 (NG911) system. Pasquotank was one of the first counties in the state to do this and achieve “i3 compliance.”
* GIS staff also scanned the tax ownership books and made them available online. The books show a complete ownership record going back over 100 years. They were all hand written, and there was no backup or digital version of this data. With COVID-19, the public is no longer able to touch the books, so having the information backed up and online was a major customer service initiative**.**

**Human Resources Department – Steps Taken toward Establishing Safety Program**

Human Resources has been actively enrolling employees in the NCACC‘s NeoGov County College, where employees have access to various safety training courses and videos. The Department has also utilized the courses to help departments address disciplinary issues. They hope to be able to have another meeting soon with Michelle Harris (NCACC Risk Control Specialist) and implement several other programs that were put on hold due to COVID-19.

**Information Technology Department – Overall Technology Support and New Staff Hired**

* As indicated in many of the departmental accomplishments, the County made significant advancements in technology in 2020. The IT Department was ultimately responsible for oversight of vendors and/or implementation of all of these improvements.
* The IT Department has two new staff members that were hired in July and August of 2020. The compensation increases approved by the Board made a major difference in the ability to attract staff for the department, as the applicant pools were strong for both positions. User departments have been very pleased with the support from IT, as both employees were well qualified.

**Pasquotank County Library – Online Presence Increased**

In collaboration with Elizabeth City Pasquotank Public Schools (ECPPS), the Library ensured that every student has a digital library card for online materials.  The Library more than doubled its online presence from the previous year.

**Planning & Inspections – Online Permitting Software Implemented**

Planning & Inspections implemented new building inspections software that facilitates online permitting. The new software, iWorQ, allows for new permits to be submitted, paid, and issued through an online dashboard on the County’s website. This program also allows staff to update inspection results directly from the field and to upload pictures that document their observations. This information is immediately available to contractors and homeowners through an online portal.

**Register of Deeds Office – Certifications Obtained**

Clem White and Penny Newbern attended classes and obtained enough hours through the North Carolina Association of Registers of Deeds (NCARD) to be certified as Register of Deeds and Assistant Register of Deeds respectively.

**Sheriff’s Office – Significant Technology Advancements**

* Body cameras were purchased in October 2020 and all officers received training by November 9, 2020.
* A Mavic Enterprise Dual and a DJI Matreese 600 Pro drone were purchased in August 2020 using COVID-19 Grant Funds.
* A new video recording system used to record and document interviews was installed in the Investigations Suite (interview and polygraph room) using COVID-19 Grant funds. This system records with 4 cameras in each room and records the interview to a hard drive which is backed up on a server. This provides a more secure way to document interviews allowing the investigator to watch the interview after the fact and also share the recording with the District Attorney’s Office. The old system burned the interview directly to a DVD which would occasionally malfunction causing a total loss of that recording.

**Department of Social Services – Service Delivery Modifications due to COVID-19**

* State waivers were implemented with regard to various programs, but staff continued to ensure that casework was maintained, applications completed, eligibility determined, contacts made, and services provided to those in need – in all program areas.
* Services staff have continued to respond and assess the safety of children and vulnerable adults – provide care, transport, place, attend court, supervise visits, insure permanency, etc.
* Outside drop box was installed to allow for clients to drop off paperwork afterhours and to reduce foot traffic inside the agency.
* Staff adapted to virtual required state audits/monitoring:Fiscal Monitoring; Single-County Audit; Recipient Eligibility Determination Audit; Management Evaluation Monitoring; Child Care Subsidy Monitoring; and IVE Foster Care Monitoring.

**Solid Waste Department** – **Compliance with all Operational Requirements**

There were no “notice of violations” issued by NCDEQ or any other agency for the operations of any of our department facilities in 2020. This is a testament to the dedication and hard work of both our Solid Waste staff and the sub-contractors employed.

**Tax Department** – **Operations Maintained during COVID-19**

Despite COVID-19, the Tax Department has continued to operate business as usual.   An additional drop box for tax payments was installed in front of the building.  Due to travel restrictions, staff has successfully completed Continuing Education Hours as mandated by NCDOR via Zoom.

**Utilities Department – 20-Year Water and Sewer Master Plan; South Mills Water; and Remote Read Meters**

* The 20-year Water and Sewer Master Plan for the Utilities Department was completed, and is now in the process of being implemented.
* Entered into an agreement with South Mills Water Association to purchase the Pasquotank County territory of their water system. This has been a County goal for over 20-years.
* The department has installed approximately 900 remote read meters into our system. We have approximately 1,500 additional meters ready to be installed when the weather will allow.

**3. FY2021-22 BUDGET:**

Finance Officer Sheri Small provided a list of outstanding debt and reviewed general fund revenues and expenditures.

County Manager budget priorities for FY2021-22:

**Employee Compensation and Benefits**

* **Cost of Living Increase (% To Be Determined)**
  + Implementation of the Compensation Study in Fiscal Year 2019-2020 (Enterprise Funds) and Fiscal Year 2020-21 (General Fund) made salary ranges competitive.
  + Need to transition away from set dollar amount pay increases to stay competitive and avoid salary compression.
* **401(k) – Up to 5% Match (% To Be Determined)**
  + Salaries are competitive, but the lack of a 401(k) makes benefit package uncompetitive.
  + Other local jurisdictions offer a 5% 401(k) to all employees: City of Elizabeth City; Camden County; and Currituck County.

**Public Safety**

* **Holiday Pay for Patrol Deputies**
  + The Board approved Holiday Pay for Deputies in December; we must identify funding for FY2021-22.
* **Holiday Pay for Emergency Medical Services**
  + We need to make all Public Safety departments consistent.
  + **Shift Differential for Patrol Deputies**
* .50/hour for Night Shift Deputies, this is consistent with the shift differential for Central Communications.
* **Two Full-time Deputies – Courthouse Security**
  + - * This will be the first phase of a plan to enhance Courthouse Security.
* **Ambulance** 
  + - * We did not fund an ambulance in the FY2020-21 budget; ongoing purchases of ambulances is needed to keep the fleet up-to-date.
* **Two Fire Trucks**
  + - * There is currently a significant backlog to receive fire trucks due to supply chain issues related to the truck cab and chassis. We would initiate the bid process for Weeksville in July of 2021 and Providence in January of 2022.

**Other Priorities**

* **Soil and Water – Drainage Projects – Increase to $100,000**
  + - * We have drainage concerns throughout the County.  This will continue the trend of increased drainage funding (FY18-19 - $25,000; FY19-20 - $40,000; and FY20-21 - $60,000).
* **NCACC – Management Fellow** 
  + - * The Board approved in December.
* **New Position – Procurement Agent/Grants Manager**
* **Maintenance Department – Converting Part-time Position approved in FY2020-21 Budget to Full-time**

**4. COLLEGE OF THE ALBEMARLE CAPITAL PROJECT – SIMULATION LAB:**

COA President, Jack Bagwell introduced Robin Harris, Dean of Health Science and Wellness Programs, and Jim Davidson, Chief Operating Officer. Dr. Bagwell provided a brief overview of current COA activities, as well as a brief COVID update. He stated that COA has the #1 nursing programs in the state.

Ms. Harris said COA has a huge history with nursing. They have over thirty different types and levels of programs between curriculum and continuing education that are the workforce for northeastern North Carolina. Since 2004, the estimated number of students in the COA Health Science Programs has increased from 330 students to over 7,000 students. Over that time, simulation has become an extremely important part of several of their programs and they are running out of space.

Ms. Harris explained that COA Health Sciences has outgrown its current facilities on the Elizabeth City campus, which impacts quality of programming, meeting accreditation, and governing agency requirements, ability to expand current programs, ability to add new programs, and meeting the workforce needs of our service area. She stated that some of the classrooms and labs are too small for the number of students. They are out of office space and storage space. Some programs need to expand, but space and clinical limitations are inhibiting this. They need better technology and coordinated simulation across all programs. She said they need to increase simulation to meet their clinical needs. They have exhausted all strategies to resolve these issues.

Ms. Harris said what they are looking for in a new building is to be able to expand several of their current programs, as well as offer additional programs such as Dental Assisting, Physical Therapy Aide/Assistant, Veterinary Tech/Assistant, Massage Therapy, continuing education courses for existing health care workers, and simulation for their facility partners to keep their existing workforce current, but they need more space.

Mr. Davidson provided renderings of COA’s proposed new facility. Through the RFQ process, ClarkNexsen was selected as the architect to design the building, which was a building designed specifically around Dean Harris’ presentation she just presented. He noted that there is a huge concentration on flexibility of the classrooms, and is designed to accomplish all the needs of the programs previously discussed. When they did the first programming of the building, they came in at 36,000 sq. ft. When they calculated the cost (approximately $21M), they went back to the architect and asked them to lose 10,000 sq. ft. so that they could get it into a budget that is feasible. They tightened up the building and were able to reduce it down to 26,000 sq. ft., with an estimated cost all in of $13,591,496. He noted that this does not count NC Bond money, donations, or grant funding.

Dr. Bagwell stated that they have some money that will help with FFE and simulation. They have simulation equipment that they will bring in. He said they have $424,000 that came from the Hospital Authority. The foundation is raising money for their two new facilities right now, with the idea that they will keep some of that. They will try to use as much college money as they can, so that they can keep some of this as seed money for programming, etc. He said yes there is some, but until they get the Dare facility online next year and the Currituck facility online this year, he is not sure how much it will be. He said where they would need help is with the construction.

Dr. Bagwell said his take away to the Board is he hopes that they picked up on the positivity that Dean Harris demonstrated. You have a couple of options when running out of space. You can curl up in a ball, suck your thumb, and hope that someone comes to save you. This group of folks has not been waiting on Superman. They are moving forward and achieving the #1 ranking and educating a slew of people that are changing the world around them every day. They know that they can even get better and do more. They know that the old President’s home has been a stopgap measure. Frankly, they have been showing it to folks and it has been embarrassing to show, but they are also telling the story that they are making the most of what they have and that they are working to bring some new things to bear.

Dr. Bagwell stated that the Elizabeth City Campus is the hub of their healthcare activity. It is also the hub of the seven region college. Their intent is to have what their students deserve, their community deserves, and their facility and staff deserve as the top #1 program, which is facilities that allow them to do what they need to do moving forward. They do not want to ask for more than they can use, but they also don’t want to be full and not able to expand as soon as they move in, like they did sixteen years ago. He said he appreciates the Board’s help and support.

Vice-Chairman Jordan asked if surrounding counties will help with the cost since they bring students in as well. Dr. Bagwell explained that our students from Pasquotank also go to Dare and they are putting up an $18.5M building now and Currituck is building a $20M facility. Pasquotank County would be responsible for this facility.

Commissioner Overman asked if the proposed building will be able to house students for the next twenty years. Dean Harris said she feel that it will. Commissioner Overman asked what was taken out of the original drawings. Mr. Davidson answered mainly storage. The facility was originally designed as a single story, but it was more economical to build a second story and attach it to an existing building. Commissioner Overman stated that if extra space is needed, an additional story would be more cost effective.

Commissioner Sterritt asked where they facility would be located. Dr. Bagwell said what they are proposing is an attachment to the Owen Center.

Commissioner Lavin noted that staff has made a very good case. He said he thought it was good that they showed the number of organizations that they partner with and the effect this has on our local economy. He is supportive and is interested to keep talking with them to try to figure out how to make it happen.

Commissioner Meads asked how much funding is available currently. Dr. Bagwell said right now they have a little over a million dollars in bond funds, as well as the foundation funds, which is at least $400,000, but could be more depending on what the foundation will do. The foundation has committed $2.3M to help them put furniture, fixtures, and technology in the buildings.

Chairman Griffin said he would like to talk about the realization and the competiveness of the other three counties and why the aviation and BLET programs went to Currituck. Dr. Bagwell said in order for their communities to grow, they need to make sure that they provide support. He said Dare already has $10M in their capital improvement plan for whatever comes next on that campus. He said their heart and thought is for the hub of healthcare. This is where it makes sense. There is no secret that Dare would love to have a nursing program. He said they will expand into all of our counties, but the hub must be somewhere. There is not an anchor program in Dare that is a big ticket program, but they have money on the table that they would bring to bear to try to foster some additional things. Dean Harris noted that Dare does not have the medical infrastructure to do clinical rotations.

Commissioner Perry asked if there are programs that citizens can participate in by utilizing the Intercounty Public Transit Authority. Dean Harris said without ICPTA, many of their students could not get to campus. Many of their entry level students utilize the ICPTA, and it is crucial to their program.

Commissioner Lavin stated that there are some programs though Workforce Development to help students with assistance to get to class or for childcare during classes.

County Manager Hammett asked if this will impact our next year’s budget. He asked when the desired project start date is. Dr. Bagwell said they have talked about the 3-5 year window. The sooner the better, but they are at the beginning stages of the conversation.

Dean Harris said she would like to add that every year almost 350 students earn a new credential to enter the healthcare workforce at COA.

**5. COUNTY ATTORNEY UPDATE:**

County Attorney Mike Cox provided an overview on Public Records/E-mails, Rules of Procedures, Conflicts of Interest, Closed Sessions, 160D Planning, Animal Control Ordinance, and Redistricting.

**6. CAPITAL PROJECTS/SPACE NEEDS:**

Mr. Hammett provided an overview of capital projects and space needs.

**EMS Headquarters**

Concerns with the Current Main EMS Station (Station 50)

* Electrical Capacity – The main EMS Station is out of power expansion options and has been retrofitted in numerous ways in order to accommodate current electrical demands.
* Overcrowding – Staff are forced to work too closely together at the current facility.
* Fixed Generator is Obsolete – The 40KW generator which supports the EMS facility is beyond its life expectancy.  Parts are hard to come by when repairs are needed and costs for continuing to repair the unit are increasing.  Quite often, the generator will not start when required during a power failure, leaving ambulances stuck inside the building until the large bay doors can be manually lifted.
* Septic System – The EMS septic system has been plagued with constant clogging and backups; both in the building and in the system outside of the building.  The complete, double-pump discharge system was completely rebuilt in 2020 with hopes of extending its life.
* Water Pressure/Source – The water pressure is maintained by a pump system located in the attic which increases water pressure upon demand.  The current EMS facility is fed from a small line which comes from the hospital and incoming pressure is greatly affected by water demand at the hospital.  Pressures are lower in the summertime when the chillers are activated at the hospital.
* HVAC – The HVAC systems are outdated and in need of constant repair.  There are two HVAC systems in the EMS facility; one in the main living quarters (replaced three years ago) and one in the Training Room which is repaired multiple times each year.
* Egress – There is inadequate egress at the facility.  In the event of an emergency, the bedrooms only have one exit; there are no fire escape exits available in the bedrooms.
* Equipment Space – Numerous ambulances and vital pieces of equipment are kept outdoors.  This causes extreme heat and cold which affects equipment.
* Inadequate Bunking Facilities – There is inadequate space for the co-ed housing of male and female technicians at the main EMS Station.  Staff sometimes must sleep in the general living quarters in order to maintain male/female separation.
* Secured Building Access – The current door entry system is controlled off-premises and is plagued with malfunctions.  These malfunctions prohibit staff entry and exit through the bay doors due to system malfunctions.  This is a safety hazard.
* Hospital Traffic Hazards – The EMS facility is located just outside of a dangerous curve in the back of the hospital.  Ambulances are in danger of being struck from vehicles rounding the curve at high rates of speed.  Pedestrian traffic at the EMS Station is at risk for the same reason.
* Training Facility Limits Training Options – With the inadequate space and outdated technology, training options are limited.

Advantages of the New Facility

* Proximity to the expanding Halstead Blvd Extended area is a signigicant benefit, giving EMS quick access to one of the fastest growing areas in our region.

* Allows for redrawing of EMS districts so that response time is reduced.
* Accommodates the growth of the agency by providing adequate bathrooms, bathing facilities, and co-ed sleeping quarters.
* A multi-agency, state of the art training facility will increase the ability to train via different methods such as in person, online and teleconferencing.
* EMS would be positioned underneath its dispatch tower, allowing for clear and distinct receipt of EMS call pages.
* Boosting employee morale by having a new, state-of-the-art facility.
  + More efficient response to outlying districts, such as the northern areas of Pasquotank and Camden Counties.  Mutual aid requests to Perquimans County can also be more rapidly deployed
* Adequate equipment storage to accommodate ambulances, light trailers, portable generators, a trailered UTV and a Special Response Unit that is equipped to handle a regional mass casualty.
* Better security.
* The cohesive partnership with Sentara Albemarle Medical Center can be continued since EMS will continue to be on the same campus.

EMS Headquarters – Next Steps

* Meet with Sentara to confirm location of the 3-acre site that was approved in the Lease Buy-Out Agreement.
* Develop a Request for Qualifications for Architectural and Engineering Services to design the Headquarters facility. The recommended firm would be brought back to the Board for approval.
* Preliminary Cost Estimate - $4 to $6 million.
* Source of Funding – $5.1 million available from Sentara Lease Escrow Funds toward project costs.

**EMS - Soundneck Renovation**

Advantages of Converting the Former Soundneck VFD Station 6 to an EMS Facility

* Reducing the personnel load in the main EMS Station (Station 50).
* Providing a public safety presence for the entire south side of Pasquotank County.
* Decreasing response times for the southern end of Pasquotank County; specifically, the areas of Glen Cove, Soundneck and Esclip Road.
* Allowing for redrawing of EMS System response districts to allow for more efficient coverage.
* Distributing EMS equipment more effectively so that as many resources as possible can be housed.

EMS Soundneck Renovation – Next Steps

* Solicit bids for necessary renovation costs.
* Place item on an upcoming Finance Committee agenda for Board consideration.
* Preliminary Cost Estimate - $25,000 - $35,000.
* Source of Funding – FY2020-21 Contingency Funds.

**Commissioners Board Room & Public Defender Relocation**

Project Update

* One of the Board’s Fiscal Year 2020-21 Goals is to: Develop a plan to establish permanent Board meeting space. The Board approved moving forward with this project on August 3rd.
* As previously discussed with the Board, the existing Public Defender space (3,200 sf) in the Courthouse could be reconfigured to meet space needs for the Clerk of Court’s Office, and to establish a permanent space for Board meetings.
* Space currently occupied by the DayBreak Adult Day Care will be the relocation site for the Public Defender’s Office. DayBreak ended operations at the Edgewood Center in June of 2020; however, their lease expires on March 31st.
* The DayBreak space is approximately 6,300 sf, and a portion of the space will be reconfigured for relocation of the Public Defender’s Office.
* The Public Defender’s Office is currently 3,200 sf, and the offices are significantly larger than normal. The estimated space need would be 2,500 to 3,000 sf.
* During my meeting with ECPPS last week, they indicated a need for additional space for Support Services. ECPPS Support Services currently occupies approximately 5,000 sf in the Edgewood Center. A portion of the DayBreak space (3,300 to 3,800 sf) could potentially be allocated to ECPPS.

Board Direction

* Would the Board support allocating a portion of the DayBreak space at the Edgewood Center to ECPPS Support Services?  Consensus to support.
* We have major difficulties with outdated technology for meeting purposes. I would highly recommend state-of-the-art technology for the new Board Room which would include the capability to stream Board meetings. As a result of COVID-19, the way that the country does business is changing; virtual meetings will continue to be commonplace. First impressions mean everything. It is important to use reliable and advanced technology for conveying information to citizens and for economic development purposes.
* Does the Board support state-of-the-art technology for the new Board Room? Consensus to support.

Board Room & Public Defender Relocation – Next Steps

* Request for Qualifications for Architectural and Engineering Services will be posted next week for the Courthouse and Edgewood Center building renovations. The recommended firm will be brought back to the Board for approval.
* Preliminary Cost Estimate – To Be Determined.
* Source of Funding – Capital Reserve Funds.

**Department of Social Services Blount House**

Blount House History

* The Blount House is located beside the Department of Social Services/Albemarle Regional Health Services Building at 713 Roanoke Avenue and is approximately 1,600 square feet.
* The Board of Commissioners purchased the house for approximately $83,000 in July of 1999 (house - $80,000 + purchase expenses).
* The purpose of the purchase was to help ensure the safety of the staff working in the facility and for the potential temporary care of foster children.
* The Blount’s were given a Lease/Life Estate Agreement for the use of the property.  Ms. Blount passed away recently and the County will now take possession of the house.
* Ms. Blount’s family has been given time to remove the belongings.  After the home is cleared, we will assess the condition of the house for potential use by the Department of Social Services.
* Based on the exterior appearance and discussions with Maintenance Director, Vinny Freeman, the house is in relatively good condition.

Possible DSS Use of the Blount House

Family Visitation

* + The house may offer an opportunity for parents/children to have a more true-to-life supervised visitation.    This would be for children in DSS custody who are court ordered to have visitation with removal parents, siblings, and/or extended family.
  + The house would only be open for visitation when supervised by DSS staff.
  + Staff would not regularly be stationed at this location – i.e., it would not become an open-for-business office.

Temporary Hold (Awaiting Placement or Return to Family)

* + While it would not be the primary “go to” option,  it could be used for temporary holds if DSS did have to have a child or sibling group stay for a short period of time (per NC General Statutes – up to 12 hours on weekdays/24 hours on weekends) until family could get to DSS, or overnight until placement could be found.
  + If the house was an “annex” of the building and not for the purpose of a “shelter” then DSS should not have to adhere to licensing standards in such instances of securing placement.  This would provide a more “normal” setting for the children, and would not be as disruptive to the workplace during regular business hours.
  + Such an arrangement would require two staff to be present with and supervising the children for the duration of the temporary hold until which time the child(ren) could safely be returned to their home, parent/caregiver or placement provider.

Storage (Misc. Items & Files)

* The space could be used for “new” donations that DSS often receives for children and adults (coats, clothing, toiletry items, school supplies, etc.).  Such items are currently stored in various office spaces, workroom cabinets and the extra bathroom.
* The Blount House may also be a great place for DSS to adequately organize and locate items needed, without having to purchase them in the middle of the night/early morning.  (The department has not been storing as much due to COVID-19.  In the past, they were able to place free clothing/items in the lobby for anyone who had the need.)
  + The additional room would also be useful for children/adult items that DSS is currently storing for children in custody or adult wards – when they cannot take the items with them and/or until we can return the items to their family. Children often accumulate many items when they move from placement to placement and are not always allowed to take everything with them.  DSS ends up boxing/labeling/storing the items in workers’ offices or other random places in the building until the child leaves custody.
  + This may also be a great location to store ‘DECEASED’ cases that DSS is not otherwise allowed to purge or other cases that the records retention schedule prevents the department from purging either forever or for 10 years (Medicaid).

Alternate Use

* The observation area/visitation room has also been used by a licensed psychologist who has conducted parenting capacity evaluations during the course of the foster care case.  To be able to conduct this observation in a more “normal” setting would increase the validity of the evaluation, and possibly support the reunification efforts or another permanent plan.

Benefit of Additional Office Space by Moving Visits

* If we are able to move Supervised Visitations outside of the agency, then DSS could potentially free up two spaces for the purpose of office space (the observation room and the visitation room).

 DSS Blount House – Next Steps

* Solicit bids for necessary renovation costs.
* Place item on an upcoming Finance Committee agenda for Board consideration.
* Preliminary Cost Estimate – To Be Determined.
* Source of Funding – To Be Determined Based on Cost (potentially Maintenance Department budget or Capital Reserve Funds).

**Telework**

* The Telework Enhancement Act defines telework or teleworking as a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee's position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work.  In practice, telework is a work arrangement that allows an employee to perform work, during any part of regular, paid hours, at an approved alternative worksite (e.g. home or telework center).
* In response to COVID-19, the County temporarily expanded the use of teleworking to reduce the number of employees working together in offices.
* Telework, with the appropriate policy and supervisory framework, could help address space needs and potentially serve as a recruiting tool.

Department of Social Services – Telework

* With state COVID-19 funds earmarked for APS/CPS Social Work staff, DSS was able to add 22 laptop computers to their inventory allowing all social workers to have potential telework capability.
* DSS has also contracted with Soundside Group to help with increasing the VPN lines, and ensuring VPN accesses for required security when working outside of the agency via the agency server.
* The goal is to continue to increase the department’s capacity to meet the increased virtual and technology demands that are leading many of the programs into a “paperless” direction.

Telework – Next Steps

* Develop formal Telework policy.
* Place item on an upcoming Finance Committee agenda for Board consideration.

**7. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:**

Mr. Jackson Stancil, the County’s Lobbyist provided a legislative update.

**8. FY2021-22 GOALS:**

Mr. Hammett stated that staff will develop Goals from the Retreat sessions based on the information presented, and feedback from Commissioners during the presentations. He noted that some of the FY20-21 Goals were multi-year goals, and they will be continued for FY21-22. The draft FY21-22 Goals will be presented for discussion at the March 15th Finance Committee meeting. He asked each Commissioner what they would like for the County to accomplish in FY21-22.

Commissioner Perry stated that he would like the Board to take a “deep dive” into restructuring. He asked staff to prepare a resolution honoring Judge J.C. Cole that can be presented at his upcoming retirement celebration. He would also like to receive permission to hang a portrait of Judge Cole hung in a courtroom in the courthouse. Attorney Cox said traditionally judges hang their portraits in the county they reside in. Commissioner Perry said he thinks it would do us favor if we hang an African American portrait in our courtroom.

Vice-Chairman Jordan said many of the things he would like to see, we are already working on such as recreation in Newland and purchase of the South Mills Water Association. He understands that we are working on the “hunting with dogs” issues, but he would like staff to somehow let individuals know that we are making on effort to help them. He said we need to educate citizens on what we can and cannot do. He wishes that all the individuals involved could work it out and compromise with each other. Drainage is also a big issue that is being worked on. He feels the Drainage Committee has made a real good start and they need to continue.

Commissioner Overman stated that he is looking forward to having a new meeting space. He is glad that Station 6 will be utilized as an EMS substation. It will be a tremendous asset to the Weeksville VFD because they are basically running two stations currently. He said we should have a conversation with COA regarding placement of an EMS bay in their new building, because once the headquarters are moved to Halstead Ext. there will be no EMS coverage on that side of town.

Commissioner Lavin stated that last year was pretty ambitious. This year looks to be pretty ambitious as well. He stated that he appreciates former Commissioner Mead’s stance on our property tax rate in the area. He said he does not know if this is the time to fund a study to see what our budget would look like without property tax. He doesn’t know if we can ever get to that point, but we will never know until we look into it and see what it would take. County Manager Hammett noted that we could do that, but we would not be able to provide any services.

Commissioner Meads said he is impressed with the County keeping costs down, and paying down its loans. He would like to see the County continue on in that direction. After hearing COA’s request, he is asking himself, “what are we going to do now.” He stated that we need to find the money somewhere because he does not want to go into further debt. Vice-Chairman Jordan said he had the same thoughts about where the money would be coming from.

Commissioner Sterritt stated that he has 3.5 years to serve, and that’s it. He is hoping that during that time he can have a number of discussions with commissioners, staff, and the community and interest them in answering the question, why does COA not have a gymnasium for students. He asked how many community colleges in the state have gymnasiums. He would be interested in knowing the answer.

A number of years ago there was a new community college, with a new president and a new board. They were told they had to choose between a library or a gymnasium. He said they chose the gymnasium because they knew they would get a library, but if they spent the money for a library they weren’t sure they would get a gymnasium. He said COA had a gymnasium at the Elizabeth City campus in the past. It was built by Mr. Gardner for $260,000. He said he used it, as well as the drama department. They tolerated each other and got by. It served well for the students.

He said the County should give COA a gymnasium, and it can be shared with the nurses. It would be a lot more space than they would get for $13 million. The $13 million could be used for something else. He said the campus needs a gymnasium. Students need activity.

Commissioner Sterritt said COA had a baseball program on two different occasions for a number of years each, and had some really good coaches. He said they finally had a president that didn’t love baseball gone. Sheriff Cartwright and he raised $250,000 to keep the baseball program going. The next president did away with baseball. The current president came from a college that did away with intercollegiate athletics. He said maybe he will listen, maybe our manager will listen, and maybe our finance officer will listen. He said at any rate it can be done. Elizabeth City State University had a baseball program. We now have a Christian university with a nice baseball program. It can be done. He said he approached each individual county commissioner at one point and said there is a piece of property one half mile north of town for sale, and we need to think about buying ten acres of the 22 acre piece of property. The question was, how much. They came up with $2,500 to have it appraised. He got a commitment from 85% of the commissioners to allocate $300,000 to buy the piece of property. As it turned out, the owner of the property decided not to sell it, because he felt the offer was not enough.

County Manager Hammett said he is reaching out to COA President Jack Bagwell so he can reach out to his counterparts to see if any of the other community colleges have a gym.

The retreat was adjourned at 3:23 PM.

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CHAIRMAN

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CLERK TO THE BOARD