**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA MARCH 29, 2021**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a joint meeting with the City Council of Elizabeth City on Monday, March 29, 2021 in the Foreman Center Building at College of the Albemarle.

**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 Director

Brian Parnell, Emergency Management Coordinator

Shelley Cox, Planning Director

Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board

Also present were the Mayor and Council, the City Manager, the Assistant City Manager, and the City Clerk. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Chairman Lloyd Griffin and Mayor Bettie Parker. Following the invocation, everyone recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. Chairman Griffin and Mayor Parker provided brief opening statements.

**1. PRESENTATION OF PROCLAMATION HONORING MAYOR PARKER:**

Mayor Pro Tem Johnnie Walton presented Mayor Bettie J. Parker a proclamation honoring her for Women’s History Month.

**2. INTRODUCTION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR BRIAN PARNELL:**

County Manager Sparty Hammett stated that Christy Saunders retired on December 31, 2020 after 25 years of service. Mr. Parnell started on January 4, 2021. Ms. Saunders built an extremely solid Emergency Management foundation, as the only Emergency Management Coordinator in the state with the responsibility of two counties. He said a continuing key to success is strong communication and cooperation among the different agencies and departments. Mr. Parnell was the Area I Coordinator for the North Carolina Division of Public Safety Division of Emergency Management since May 2013, so he knows all the players. With Mr. Parnell’s knowledge and background, he has been able to immediately step into the role and hit the ground running. One of Mr. Parnell’s major responsibilities has been to support efforts at the COVID-19 clinics, with message boards, light towers, and coordination of law enforcement and EMS staff. Mr. Hammett welcomed Mr. Parnell as the new Coordinator for the Pasquotank-Camden-Elizabeth City Emergency Management.

Mr. Parnell said he appreciates the opportunity to be here, and looks forward to working with everyone.

**3. PRESENTATION – COLLEGE OF THE ALBEMARLE – PRESIDENT, DR. JACK BAGWELL:**

COA President, Dr. Jack Bagwell welcomed everyone to the campus. He stated that COA was the first comprehensive community college in North Carolina, and is in its 60th year of operation. One of the things that separates COA from many other community colleges is that they have so many people that continue to serve and be part of the colleges activities even long past when they were a student or faculty members, such as Commissioner Sterritt and Marion Harris. He believes this speaks volumes for the institution and the COA family.

Dr. Bagwell said that COA was recently recognized by registerednursing.org as the #1 nursing program in North Carolina, which includes larger universities like Duke and Chapel Hill. This year a new Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) program was started on the Chowan Campus. He said the big thing that they have been engaged in is their strategic planning sessions. They are looking at their mission, vision, values, and a full strategic plan. In addition to the strategic planning, they are: reorganizing spaces to make sure they have more industrial and trade programs; focusing on their adult learners; looking at short-term initiatives to get people back to work; starting a dental assisting program; developing and refining their case statement for an expanded health science nursing simulation facility; and continuing to raise money for facilities that are coming online. In the short-term future, they are bringing on approximately 18,000 square feet in Currituck this fall, as well as 36,000 square feet in Dare in the Spring/Summer 2022.

He said the transition COA is going through is not about space, programs, or groups of people, but is about the individuals and the transformation that can happen in a life. They believe that no other institution transforms a life like a community college can.

**4. COVID-19 UPDATE – ALBEMARLE REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES DIRECTOR, BATTLE BETTS:**

Albemarle Regional Health Services Director, Battle Betts provided an update on COVID-19. He said it is hard to believe that it has been a year since we came together to discuss what our next course of action would be or what the trajectory would be with the pandemic. He thanked all the wonderful partners and volunteers that have made the pandemic survivable, including Emergency Management, Law Enforcement, Hospital Partners, ECSU, COA Nursing Program, National Guard, Albemarle Commission, Civic Organizations, and Volunteers.

Mr. Betts said as of March 15th, ARHS did stand down their internal incident command structure.

He stated that they are currently serving everyone who is 18 years of age and over with vaccines in all eight counties. They have been very fortunate to stay well ahead of the Governor’s planned phases. Pasquotank County has consistently been in the top five in all counties in vaccination percentage. Twelve of the top counties in North Carolina are all located in northeastern North Carolina. As of last Friday, 45% of the region has received their first dose of vaccine and just over a third has been fully vaccinated. This week, our area should exceed 100,000 doses combined of first and second doses. He estimated we are at 18-20% implied herd immunity. The goal is to reach 60-70%.

As of Friday, there were 97 active cases region-wide. There were 25 in Pasquotank County and six in Camden County. As of today, the region-wide total is 73, with 18 active cases in Pasquotank and one in Camden County. As of April 1st, they are moving to an “appointment based only” system for first doses, and mass clinics for second doses. Their hope is that they can stand down their mass clinic program for second doses by the end of April. He stated that ARHS should have an opportunity to obtain some of the Johnson and Johnson vaccines in the next couple weeks to target our homeless population, jail residents, and migrant workers.

Mr. Betts noted that they have done a lot of outreach outside of the mass settings, as far as going into churches, community groups, NAACP, and housing authorities across the district. They have provided transportation to individuals who do not have access to get to clinic sites. They are basically trying to reduce all of the barriers they can. He believes our next hurdle will be the healthcare challenges from the isolation individuals have faced over the last year.

**5. PRESENTATION – NORTHEASTERN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD DIRECTOR, DAVE WHITMER:**

Northeastern Workforce Development Board Director, Dave Whitmer provided an annual update on the Northeastern Workforce Development Board (WFDB). He recognized Chairman Griffin for all his support he provides for their board, as well as Commissioner Lavin who has been a longtime board member that was recently elected as chairman.

Mr. Whitmer stated that the purpose of Workforce Development Boards is to provide policy, planning and oversight for local workforce development programs, including the NCWorks Career Centers in the region, and to address workforce issues as identified by the communities they represent. Their core purpose is to resolve workforce issues and challenges to meet the North Carolina employment needs.

In 2020, WFDB:

* Provided $172K in scholarships to help pay tuition for their customers, allowing them to earn in-demand certifications, diplomas, and degrees.
* Provided $90K in child care expenses, allowing their customers to go to school and complete training.
* Provided $74K in transportation assistance allowing their customers to go to school and complete training.
* Provided $45K for supplies, tools, books, and other items allowing their customers to go to school, training, and work.
* Provided $34K of grant funding to local businesses to help them upskill their current employees, resulting in increasing the competitiveness of their business and helping them retain staff.
* Provided $95K in grant funding to local businesses to help offset the costs of training new employees.
* Provided $40K in grant funding to community college students to help them overcome emergency situations that could have prevented them from completing their educational goals.
* Through their NCWorks Career Centers, provided services to 412 employers to help them recruit, retrain, and train staff.
* Provided $42K in wages to young adults while they worked with local employers to help them develop soft and hard skills.
* Provided 46 work-based learning opportunities for young adults to gain hands-on occupations experience working with local employers.
* Passed 20 of 22 Federal WIOA Performance Measures.
* Through their NCWorks Carrier Centers, provided employment services, including resume assistance, interview preparation, and stills assessments, and job search assistance to 7,233 job seekers in the region.
* Moved their NCWorks Carrier Center in Elizabeth City to a new location with more space and modern amenities including a classroom and expanded computer lab.
* Started offering employability workshops virtually, allowing their customers to participate from anywhere throughout their 10-County region.
* Developed a new partnership with Elizabeth City State University to assist them with a Golden Leaf grant project intended to assist individuals with barriers to employment to obtain skills needed to accomplish their career goals.
* Expanded their #worklocal initiative into Perquimans, Dare, Currituck, Hyde and Tyrrell Counties, to expose local high school students to career opportunities with local employers.
* Hosted 23 Community/Virtual Community Events serving 1,493 job seekers.
* Added 1,943 new Facebook followers.
* Added 1,228 new recipients to the weekly NCWorks Blast.
* Sent 9 press releases to local new agencies.
* Won NCWorks Governor’s Awards of Distinction for Outstanding Young Adult and Outstanding Employer.
* Partnered with COA to begin a new short-term training course to help create a pipeline of manufacturing employees in Chowan County; Implemented a summer “bootcamp” to expose teachers in the region to the manufacturing industry through hands-on experiences with training programs and tours at local employers.
* Worked with Beaufort County Community College staff to develop collaborative opportunities for the benefit of our region’s students, job-seekers, and employers.

**6. TOURISM UPDATE BY CORRINA RUFFIEUX:**

Tourism Director Corrina Ruffieux presented the 2020 Annual Tourism Report. She stated that as a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) their primary role is to tell the story of Elizabeth City by informing, educating and advising potential visitors in collaboration with the community partners. For the community, the role of Visit Elizabeth City is to support and promote. When they do a good job telling their community story and good news, more people want to come to school here, work here, and visit here.

In 2019, visitor spending in Pasquotank County was $69,840,000. That equals $191,342 spent by travelers every day – in our hotels, B&Bs, restaurants, retail shops, attractions, entertainment, gas stations, grocery stores, and more. In 2020, four top-tier media outlets listed the Elizabeth City region as a top place to visit in 2021 and beyond.

2020 Marketing Priorities:

* Increase demand for lodging, attraction visits, retail sales, restaurant receipts and other events and activities.
* Expand partnerships with local businesses and educate partners about the value of using the DMO as a resource and partner.
* Build relationships with the region’s tourism organizations to include Elizabeth City in the coast’s messaging and awareness that “we’re just an hour away”.
* Create a wedding campaign that promotes local vendors, encourages overnight visitation, generates revenue and increases exposure for Elizabeth City as a destination.
* Launch and capitalize on the existing reputation of Rose Buddies with an ambassador program.

With the limitations and impacts on tourism from the COVID-19 pandemic, their marketing focus has shifted. While they still plan to create a wedding campaign and launch an ambassador program within the Elizabeth City and Pasquotank County area, these initiatives have been put on hold until the threat of the virus has substantially decreased.

Advertising Media Investment:

* Over $80,000 of this calendar year’s spend was the result of a variety of CARES Act funding (through Pasquotank County Commissioners, Visit NC, North Carolina Legislature, and North Carolina Travel Industry Association), allowing them to create solid advertising programs despite funding shortfalls from the pandemic.
* Print - $31,300
* Digital - $98,500
* Public Relations - $20,000
* Total $150,800

Impressions Overview:

* Out-of-Home – 2,259,479
* Facebook/Instagram Campaigns – 677,484
* Garden & Gun Magazine – 928,234
* Google Ads – 4,910,000
* Our State Magazine – 4,910,000
* TripAdvisor.com – 1,942,293
* WRAL Branded Content – 19,070

Ms. Ruffieux stated that for the first time ever, they produced a detailed visitor’s guide. 20,000 copies are being distributed to various NC Visitor & Welcome Centers, the Tidewater Area of Virginia, the Outer Banks, and others as needed.

Social Media:

* 19,007 Facebook followers
* 2,021 followers
* 83 YouTube followers
* 18,793 referrals to the website (up 90%)

Visit Elizabeth City is funded solely by occupancy tax collections – paid for by visitors who spend the night in one of our lodging properties, whether hotel, B&B or short-term rental. This 6% tax data is a reflection on both the overall health of our region’s economy and our efforts to drive new and increased visitation. 2020 is of course an anomaly compared to other years due to forced travel restrictions imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparing year-over-year collections by category, she noted that the significant majority of revenue comes via visitors staying in hotel properties. However, it’s worth pointing out that despite the overall decrease in 2020 revenues, the short-term rental category continues to grow at a strong pace.

Ms. Ruffieux said looking ahead, 2020 will undoubtedly be a year we will never forget. At the outset, this year offered tremendous promise and potential, coming off the heels of a record breaking 2019. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has disrupted the progress underway and significantly affected our economic growth. Yet despite this longer-than-expected pause in our tourism economy, they remain confident, committed, and determined to rebound from this setback. Many experts suggest the national tourism economy may not fully recover for 2-3 years.

Important Elements for 2021:

* Leverage outdoor and socially-distanced safe activities until all health restrictions are removed.
* Partner with Visit NC as much as possible, maximizing the reach and affordable programs the state office of tourism offers.
* Continue with the significant success of specific programs including the Shop & Dine Pass, Our E-City and Christmas in Elizabeth City.
* Considering the incredible success of a fully integrated, multi-channel marketing campaign for the latter four months of 2020, incorporate as much consistent cross-channel advertising as budget allows going forward.
* Ensure they review and assess their 2019 adopted strategic plan to both stay on track and make changes and improvements as necessary.

Wayfinding Signs – Received 10 proposals. Signs Etc. was selected. Their quote was $25,000 under budgeted. The new signs will come with a 10-year warrantee. Installation is scheduled at the end of August.

**7. WALK EC UPDATE:**

City Manager Montre’ Freeman introduced Shom Tiwari, who is a North Carolina Lead Fellow at the Elizabeth City Public Utilities Department.

Mr. Tiwari stated that Walk EC, when finished, will be a guiding document that will allow pedestrians in the City and County to identify our critical needs to improve walkability in our community. By going through the process of developing a masterplan, they will be better set up to identify funding opportunities so they can build out new sidewalks, crosswalks, and multiuse paths so that everyone in our area will have the ability to safely walk through our community. The majority of the funding for the project came through a grant from the North Carolina Department of Transportation. The plan is similar to ones created by municipalities across the state. Public engagement has been a key aspect of the process. They partnered with over 40 organizations in the community to help get the word out. Nearly 600 people have provided input.

The project began in the fall of 2019 and should be coming to a close in the next few months. The next steps are to prioritize what is built first. It will be a combination of factoring in the community input they received, looking at how safety concerns will be best addressed, and what initiatives are most cost effective. Once the engineers finish their prioritization, the plan will then be submitted to NCDOT for review, and address any concerns they may have. At that point, they will present the plan to the City Council and receive their feedback as well. Once all those steps have been met, they will be able to seek funding opportunities either from the existing budget or from other grant opportunities.

**8. WALKING AND BIKING TRAILS DISCUSSION:**

City Manager Montre’ Freeman said when he attended Elizabeth City State University, he used to run out to the Coast Guard Base and back, but he always thought it would be cool if he could run around the City. He stated that 10,000+ individuals have registered for the Coast Guard Virtual Half Marathon and 5k. When he thinks about walking and riding trails, he thinks about economic development. It costs $48 to sign up for the race. If 10,000+ people registered for the virtual 5k, imagine what will happen when the event is held in-person next year. It will be a large economic impact. He really wants to capitalize on it and explore how we can build on the momentum we have. He said he would also like to see an ironman completion held in our City. With the largest Coast Guard Station in the nation, we need to take advantage of that.

Chairman Griffin asked that the City and County consider sending a letter of support to the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Pete Buttigieg, urging him to support the Future I-87 Resiliency, Innovation, Safety, Economy Project and the NCDOT’s application for federal INFRA grant funding to accelerate its construction.

Chairman Griffin asked if there was any further business to come before the Board. There being no further business;

Motion was made by Charles Jordan, seconded by Sean Lavin to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 PM.

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CHAIRMAN

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CLERK TO THE BOARD