

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF
ROWAN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
PUBLIC HEARING
JUNE 22, 1988

The Board of Rowan County Commissioners met in a Public Hearing in the Community Building on June 22, 1988 at 7:30 P.M.

PRESENT: Richard D. Messinger, Chairman
J. Newton Cohen, Sr., Vice-Chairman
Wilborn Swaim, Member
George C. Knox, Member
Jamima DeMarcus, Member

The County Manager, Finance Director, County Attorney and Clerk to the Board were also present as well as various Rowan County citizens and administrative staff.

Chairman Messinger called the meeting to order for the purpose of adopting the proposed budget ordinance for fiscal year 1988-89.

Chairman Messinger stated that the proposed Budget Ordinance indicates a levy for the fiscal year 1988-89 at the sum of seven (7) cents for a total of fifty-five (55) cents. With this in mind, Chairman Messinger opened the meeting for any public comment. He stated that the Commissioners will consider whatever comments are made in their discussions before the budget is approved.

Mrs. Faye Giles, representing the Evergreen Senior Activity Center (operators of the Rufty-Holmes Senior Center), stated that she was informed by Commissioner DeMarcus that they did not receive the \$5,000 increase over last year's appropriation. She then requested that this be reconsidered.

The County Manager noted to the Commission that the Evergreen Senior Center requested \$5,000 in addition to the \$25,000 appropriated last year when the Center was formed. Should the Commission decide to approve this increase, the total amount would be \$35,000 over the \$30,000 (\$25,000 + additional \$5,000) as the \$5,000 would be rental income that the County provides through the Office on Aging.

Commissioner DeMarcus asked Mrs. Giles to brief the Commission on their rent. Mrs. Giles replied that they pay all utilities. The only cost to the Office on Aging is their telephone bill--everything else is included in their rent. Commissioner Swaim noted due to the tight budget consideration, the Commission did not consider the increases overall but feels at this point they have found a "slight cushion" and could still maintain the 7% increase. Therefore, Commissioner Swaim indicated he would like to see that the Commission reinstate this \$5,000. Commissioner DeMarcus then concurred with this.

Mr. Walter Adams, resident of Rowan County, expressed the concern to the Commission for funding the Ruffy-Holmes Senior Center. He indicated that many citizens are very proud of this facility and would not want to see it diminish.

Mr. W. F. Owens, Jr. (Frankie), citizen of Rowan County, stated that he is opposed to the projected tax hike increase. He feels the Commission has doubled the amount of income that the County will be receiving from the tax payers at approximately \$32 Million since the last revaluation. Mr. Owens provided the Commission with information from a study done by NCAE. This study reports that North Carolina's economy and education levels indicate some parts of the State are so poor that they are compared to developing third-world nations. He stated that North Carolina is overflowing with what could be called the "working poor". Income levels of thousands of working people are still doom to poverty level. One (1) out of five (5) adults are unable to read, the infant mortality rate ranks fourth in the nation, and nearly 15% of the State's population are below the poverty line. The poverty level for a family of four (4) is \$11,208 and 14.8% live below this line compared with 13% for the nation. This article reports that Rowan County has one of the lowest average rates for manufacturing workers in the nation. The higher level of spending is below this of the State as well as the County's level of income. North Carolina ranks thirty-seven (37) as far as income in the nation. He then left the Commission with a quote from President Abraham Lincoln "You don't strengthen the poor by weakening the strong".

In regard to the seven (7)-cent tax increase, Ed Haden expressed the concern for employee pension or retirement benefits. He then asked what benefits and pension plans the County is operating under at the present time. The County Manager replied that in July 1, 1987, the County implemented a 401K retirement contribution plan for law enforcement officers in Rowan County according to State Law. This law mandated all Counties contribute 2% of Gross Pay for Law Enforcement Officers into a Special Retirement Program. At the same time this was enacted, the County Commission approved a 1% contribution for County funds into a 401K program for all county employees even though law enforcement officers were receiving 2%. The State statutes stated, effective July 1, 1988, law enforcement contributions would increase to 5%. Due to this mandate, the County Commissioners have increased the contributions for law enforcement officers' 401K program from 2% to 5% and is also considering increasing the regular employees' contributions from 1% to 3%. There are a few state bills that have been introduced that will increase the retirement contributions to all State and local government employees including retirees based on the last four (4) years' compensation. As dictated by law, the County matches Social Security (7.51%). By law, the County also matches the employees' contribution at 6% of their gross pay. The County then contributes about 5.60% into this program (Local Government Retirement System). Mr. Russell stated that all three (3) systems are mandated by General Statutes.

Mr. Haden raised the concern of the County Schools paying a Christmas Bonus to their employees and asked for verification on this. Chairman Messinger stated that he was not aware they received a Christmas Bonus and the entire Commission concurred. However, Chairman Messinger indicated that this would be clarified.

Mr. Haden then asked what the Commission's responsibility was to seeing that funds allocated to Departments are spent for constitutional purposes. Chairman Messinger replied that the County takes responsibility for their employees that work for its various departments. The exception to this is Department of Social Services where they are paid mostly by the State as well as the Department of Health. The Schools' funds are allocated to them and the Commission does not appropriate by line item; however, this can be done with Capital Funds but not with Current Expense.

Mr. Haden then noted that this year the Library has made available its facilities and support to a religious ministry and asked if tax funds were supposed to be used for this purpose. The County Manager replied that the policy Mr. Haden is referring to is a policy that was established by the Library Advisory Board. This policy particularly refers to the Rockwell Branch. Commissioner DeMarcus stated that she was familiar with the incident and it was discussed with a small committee that was appointed to bring back a recommendation. It appears that a person wanted to have a Bible Class in the Rockwell Library. The basement of this building was not completed but the citizens of Rockwell felt so strongly about wanting it finished as they had no other meeting place, that they raised money to complete the building. A clergyman then asked to use this building for a Bible Study class and had several sessions there. The Rockwell Board then decided not to have religious groups meeting there on a regular basis. However, in this circumstance, they felt it would be acceptable. The advertisement that did appear in the paper may have led to some confusion and any ads from here on out would be monitored. Mr. Haden stated that he did not put the ad in the paper and filed his judgement with the Library Board.

Terry Barber spoke in reference to the budget for EMS and the expansion that the Commission has supported. On behalf of the EMS Director, Staff, and himself he thanked the Commission for the support of the anticipated budget and expansion itself. On behalf of the Advisory Council--Mrs. Judy Barnhardt, Vice Chairman; and Dr. John Barr, Medical Director; Mr. Byrd, Chairman; he expressed appreciation for the Commission's continued support and in advance of the approval of the budget expansion.

The County Manager stated that he received a letter that Terry Barber gave him from Mr. Harry Sifford also expressing appreciation to the Commission for their support.

After a short recess, the Chairman reconvened the meeting. The County Manager addressed two (2) issues of concern:

- 1) The summary of the proposed fire taxes for the rural fire departments that become part of the Ordinance each year. The sheet for the Commission reports the current rate and the proposed rate for 1988-89. Copies of all the fire department budgets that the Fire Marshall accumulated were also provided. These were approved not only by the Board of Directors but the

Fire Commissioners as well. The Fire Commissioners are requesting an increase for the following rural fire departments:

- a) Bostian Heights Volunteer Fire Department--
From 2 3/4 cents to 3 cents
- b) Centenary Volunteer Fire Department--
From 7 cents to 7 1/2 cents
- c) Franklin Volunteer Fire Department--
From 4 1/2 cents to 5 cents
- d) Mt. Mitchell Volunteer Fire Department--
From 3 1/2 cents to 4 cents
- e) Union Volunteer Fire Department--
From 2 1/2 cents to 4 1/2 cents

The other departments remain constant for the fiscal year 1988-89. The Fire Commissioners, appointed by the County Commission, review the budget from the Board of Directors and to be certain that tax is expensed properly.

The County Manager stated that this proposal will become a part of the Ordinance and is included once the Budget Ordinance is approved. This proposal represents sections of the Budget Ordinance and unless the Commission wants to change any of this, they do not need a separate motion.

2) The County Manager provided for consideration a list of seven (7) items that either have been submitted to the Commission or that he would recommend the Commission consider should they decide to utilize the \$60,000 surplus that has been anticipated in the budget as available revenue.

* Contribution to the EDC (Economic Development Commission)--
The budget was reduced from \$6,800 to \$4,229. This would require a \$2,656 increase should the Commission decide to fully fund the EDC.

* Public Health Nurse (Health Department)--A nurse is being requested to work in the AIDS clinic as well as the WIC program. This would be funded at 50% of County cost totalling approximately \$12,448.

* Department of Social Services--This Department requested new workers: 1 Social Worker and 3 working in the Child Protection Services Department. The County Manager indicated that there may not be any Federal or State funds available since the Department of Social Services utilized their total block grant. Therefore, this would cost the County \$24,895. They also requested an Income

Maintenance Case Worker to work in the eligibility section of Medicaid. Salary and Fringe Benefits would be shared by the State and approximately 50% in Federal Funds. The total cost to the County would be \$9,750.

* Agriculture Extension Program--This Department has requested a personal computer and software to be utilized on the farms. This will enable them to aid farmers in new programs offered by the Federal Government. The cost of the computer and the computer and equipment would be approximately \$3,500.

* Personnel--They have requested an increase in training programs by coordinating with Catawba College. This will provide enhanced training for all employees at a cost of approximately \$3,285 to the County.

* Parks & Nature Center--The Nature Center has requested to renovate bird cages at approximately \$2,810. In addition, the Parks has also requested the Park Ranger position be modified from part-time to full-time. The original budget indicates a full-time position; however, in clarification, the Commission received a letter from Mr. Jim Foltz indicating that this is presently a permanent part-time position and changing it to full-time. The cost of this addition would be \$3,095.

* Transportation System--The County is close to turning over all the transportation needs to a coordinating system known as CTS Management Company. If the County decides to do this, the cost would be approximately \$16,134 which involves the Office on Aging and Special Populations.

These seven (7) items total approximately \$78,000.

Commissioner DeMarcus recommended adding the \$5,000 request for the Evergreen Senior Center to this list for consideration. In response to Chairman Messinger's concern on the Transportation Program, the County Manager replied that the Commission approved a transportation program last year for the Office on Aging and Special Populations to use Title V Drivers. The initial cost for this in the Budget is approximately \$33,000. Through adjustments in County funds, the County will turn in all the transportation to CTS Management and not use Title V Drivers. One advantage to this process is that \$16,000 would enable the County to free up about five (5) or six (6) Title V positions that could be utilized in County Government or other places that provide approximately twenty (20) or twenty-five (25) hours of staff help to various departments.

Commissioner DeMarcus spoke in favor of the full-time position at Sloan Park. It is her understanding that Sloan Park has only 1 1/2 positions. The Commission previously misunderstood the request

thinking the Parks was asking for a full-time position when actually they were requesting the part-time be changed to full-time. This is the only position that has been asked for in their five-year plan. She feels this is an adequate request due to the increased attendance at the Park. However, it was the consensus of the Board to postpone funding for the bird cages.

Chairman Messinger expressed support for the Health Department's request. Commissioner Knox concurred with this due to the fact of the worldwide problem with AIDS.

Commissioner Swaim spoke in behalf of Social Services but stated that the Commission must consider all requests.

Commissioner Cohen announced his opposition of all increased revenues. He stated that he would like to see these increases done later rather than allocated at one time.

Chairman Messinger directed a question to the County Manager regarding transportation. He stated that the Title V Drivers are senior citizens which are totally funded by the Office on Aging. He then asked if this would make these drivers available for something else should the Commission decide to fund this project. The County Manager replied that there is one (1) Title V Driver at the Agriculture Extension Center, Rufty-Holmes Senior Center, and Office of Personnel. There is one (1) or more at SOAR and possibly one (1) at Hospice. At present, Clyde Fahnestock, Director of the Office on Aging, has allocated his Title V positions to be drivers under the coordinating system. Under the coordination system (Rowan Area Transit System), CTS Management is fully responsible for not only vehicles but drivers as well. At present, CTS Management has the responsibility for all vans. The County agencies are billed for approximately fifty-one (51) cents a mile versus sixty-nine (69) cents per mile. The eighteen (18) cent per mile difference includes the driver as well as their benefits. The County would pay sixty-nine (69) cents per mile under a contract for these services. The intent is to take Transportation I to convert to a totally coordinated system. Commissioner Swaim stated that he would like to postpone this another year. Commissioner DeMarcus stated that she would like to vote on things such as the \$5,000 increase and the full-time position at Sloan Park before this decision is made.

Commissioner DeMarcus announced her opposition to increase the salary for the EDC Director as the Commission is not in favor of funding salaries over and above what they are able to pay the County employees. In clarification, the County Manager stated that the anticipated contribution being made for the Director of EDC is based upon not only the cost of living but also a merit increase based on his performance. Through a merit system, a County employee could receive a 5% increase in addition to a 4 1/2% cost-of-living

increase given to employees across the board. Therefore, if both increases are considered at the same time, then the proposed 9% increase for the EDC Director is really no more than what the County would pay.

Chairman Messinger then entertained a motion for the contribution to the Economic Development Commission. Upon lacking a motion, Chairman Messinger then entertained a motion to fund the Public Health Nurse. Commissioner DeMarcus made a motion to approve funding for the Public Health Nurse and Commissioner Knox seconded. Motion was approved and passed by Chairman Messinger and Commissioners DeMarcus and Knox and opposed by Commissioner Cohen and Swaim.

Upon a motion lacking to fund the Social Workers, Commissioner Knox then made a motion to grant the Agriculture Extension Service's request. Commissioner DeMarcus seconded for the sake of discussion. The County Manager stated that the portable computer/printer would be carried to the farm for enterprise analysis, business records, and herbicide collections. Federal software programs are being made available for this purpose. The County Manager stated that in his opinion, it would be very productive as it offers Agriculture Extension an opportunity to take the programs on the farm as opposed to the farmers visiting the Agriculture Extension Office. Commissioner Swaim stated that he would like to see this postponed another year. Motion was defeated by Chairman Messinger and Commissioners Cohen and Swaim as Commissioners DeMarcus and Knox voted to approve.

The County Manager stated that the Personnel Training Programs request would be coordinated with Catawba College in trying to develop professional training for department heads, supervisors, and all levels of management. Commissioners Swaim and DeMarcus concurred that they would like to see the County use what is already available. Chairman Messinger concurred that although the Commission is interested in training for employees, but the Commission would need more conclusive information such as the types of courses available, hours involved, and how the program would work. Therefore, a decision from the Commission was postponed until such information was provided.

Commissioner DeMarcus made a motion to increase the Park Ranger to a full-time position and Commissioner Swaim seconded as a result of it being an oversight in error on the Commission's behalf. Motion was approved and passed by Chairman Messinger and Commissioners DeMarcus, Knox, and Swaim as Commissioner Cohen opposed.

Chairman Messinger entertained a motion for a Transportation System under the Coordinated System. Commissioner Cohen made a motion to appropriate \$16,134 to the Office on Aging and Special

Populations for the transportation system's coordinated system and Commissioner Swaim seconded with unanimous approval.

Commissioner Swaim made a motion to reinstate \$5,000 to the Evergreen Senior Center and Commissioner DeMarcus seconded. Mr. Rick Eldridge, Director of the Center, stated that this money would be additional Capital money to fix curbing on the backside of the property to be used as an Operating Expense for a special capital project. This project would cost approximately \$6,000. Motion was approved and passed by Chairman Messinger and Commissioners DeMarcus, Knox, and Swaim as Commissioner Cohen opposed.

Commissioner DeMarcus made a motion for the adoption of the 1988-89 Budget Ordinance as presented with a correction on page six (6)--the "(48)" should read "(55)" to correspond with the spelled-out form. The \$36,677 modifications should also be added to the Budget Ordinance appropriately. Commissioner Knox seconded with unanimous approval.

OTHER BUSINESS:

The County manager stated that Emergency services has obtained bids on two (2) radio consoles that were budgeted in this fiscal year for their base radio station for both EMS and the County Fire Department. These bids were solicited and received from three (3) companies and a summary of these bids were provided to the Commission. Mr. Wayne Ashworth is requesting that the Commission approve the low bid for Alpha Communications for the two (2) radio consoles (\$5,955 and \$8,935). Commissioner Knox made a motion to approve Alpha Communications for two (2) radio consoles and Commissioner Swaim seconded with unanimous approval. Commissioner Cohen asked if consideration has been made to rent space at the tower at Youngs Mountain. Mr. Ashworth replied that a request has been made in the coming year's budget to rent space at Youngs Mountain either by entering into an agreement with the City on the proposed site or to put up a tower at ELC. Mr. Ashworth indicated that the yearly rental is not as much of a concern as the control lines. As a result, the control circuits are continuing to be an expense.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - LANDFILL NEGOTIATIONS:

Chairman Messinger approved that the Commission would go into Executive Session to discuss negotiations on the landfill. Commissioner DeMarcus made a motion to go into Executive Session and Commissioner Swaim seconded with unanimous approval. No action was anticipated. Commissioner Swaim made a motion to come out of

Executive Session and Commissioner Knox seconded with unanimous approval. The Public Hearing was adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy S. Powell
Clerk to the Board