

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
ROWAN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FEBRUARY 12-14, 1998 – PLANNING RETREAT
MID PINES RESORT, SOUTHERN PINES, NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: Jim Neely, Chairman
J. Newton Cohen, Vice-Chairman
Steve Blount, Member
Dave Rowland, Member
Frank Tadlock, Member

The County Manager, Clerk to the Board, Finance Director and Director of Administration were also present.

Chairman Neely called the meeting to order and introduced facilitator Larry Parks.

Mr. Parks reviewed the groundrules for discussion and encouraged the Board to fully participate. He then asked each board member to state the issues they hoped to discuss and accomplish.

Commissioner Tadlock stated he felt funding for the schools (finding different options), making promotion of the industrial park a priority and the water sewer study were three topics he felt were very important.

Commissioner Cohen stated he would like the Board to aggressively pursue alternative sources of revenue to support the schools and unfunded mandates passed down by the state.

Commissioner Rowland stated that school funding, specifically capital needs was the biggest issue facing the Board. He added that he hoped the Board could develop a plan to address the school problem.

Commissioner Neely listed his concerns as the school merger for the Cabarrus/Kannapolis schools as well as funding the Rowan/Salisbury schools.

Commissioner Blount also agreed that public education was the biggest issue before the Board and added that the Board needed to develop another set of long range goals.

Mr. Parks asked Mr. Russell if there were any issues he saw as staff that the Board needed to address. Mr. Russell stated that by working on strategic planning, growth and zoning, the Board would be able to identify certain issues that would have impact on the school system and would tie into school funding.

The Board discussed tracking the growth in the county and agreed by consensus to have planning staff track commercial, industrial and retail building permits and periodically make reports on the changes to the Board. Mr. Parks noted that Centralina Council of Governments currently tracked that type of data and stated they would be willing to work with planning staff to begin compiling this information.

PUBLIC LIBRARY:

Phil Barton, Carole Brook, Jeff Hall and Lucinda Epperson joined the Board and presented a report concerning the needs for an expanded South Rowan area library.

Mr. Hall stated that the majority of the population density for Rowan County was now located in the China Grove area. He stated that there were currently 586 people per square mile and a growth rate of 10% was expected in ten years.

Mrs. Epperson described the type of services currently offered in the South Rowan area and added that they operated a no growth facility. She said that when something such as a book was added something had to be taken out to make room for it.

Mr. Barton stated that in planning for a new facility they would like to see it changed from a South Rowan Branch to a South Regional Library to serve the entire southern region. He proposed a 20,000 square foot building and presented the Board with an analysis of what staff proposed to have in the facility. He added that they had set a goal of 1999 to begin the process of land acquisition.

Commissioner Cohen asked when the bond payment for the main headquarters ended. Mr. Barton stated that the last payment would be in 2001, noting that currently approximately \$200,000/ year was budgeted for the repayments. Some Board members discussed funding the facility through the continued budgeting of these funds. Commissioner Cohen stated he would rather use the money for the schools.

The Board discussed the possibility of raising private funds to help with the project and added that they felt that would be the only way the facility could be built.

Commissioner Rowland stated that he was open to the idea of the new facility because he felt there was a need but he would like to see what was available in outside funds.

Commissioner Tadlock stated he felt this project could be achieved but that the Library Board and staff needed a commitment from the Board of Commissioners before they could begin raising funds through private donations.

Commissioners Blount and Neely stated they felt the facility was needed but other sources of funding needed to be developed.

The Board agreed that the Library Board should develop a funding plan and bring it back to the Board.

STRATEGIC PLANNING:

George Knox, Dr. Bill McCoy and Ann Baker discussed the strategic planning process and reviewed the group's final report.

Mr. Knox stated that the Board had approved the continuation of the executive committee at an earlier meeting and asked the Board to consider appropriating \$10,000 for administrative needs for the group.

Dr. McCoy stated that he felt the Board needed to develop a comprehensive land use plan to use in conjunction with the County's zoning ordinance.

The Board asked Dr. McCoy if he had any suggestions for areas to track growth in since the Board had decided to start the process of tracking building permits. He stated that by monitoring traffic and the major thoroughfares staff would be able to determine what kind of movement was coming through the county.

Commissioner Blount noted that part of the strategic plan final report dealt with the issue of establishing various commissions. He asked if the Board would like him to work with the executive committee to determine the need for other commissions. The Board agreed by consensus that Commissioner Blount should work with the executive committee on that issue.

COUNTY ZONING:

Marion Lytle and Don Conner presented the Board with maps and issues for discussion, such as the extra-territorial jurisdiction issue with the other municipalities.

Mr. Lytle reviewed the requirements for municipalities to extend their ETJ limits. He added that he had spoken with the Institute of Government concerning the county repealing the second and third mile of a municipality's EJT area. He noted that the County must provide the municipality with a two year notice of its intent to repeal the ETJ area and added that the County may have the authority to roll back the City of Salisbury's ETJ to the 1972 city limits, since that was the year the expansion was approved by resolution.

Commissioner Rowland stated he would like staff to look at the areas the city currently controls that the county could take back and determine which county zoning classification should be given so that the areas remain as close to current city zoning classification as possible. He stated that once the county prepared this plan they could present it to the city council and if they had areas they could justify to remain in city control the county would consider their justifications.

Mr. Lytle noted that no other municipalities had ETJ areas that could be rolled back, so the issue was mainly with the City of Salisbury. Commissioner Blount stated he would like staff to work with city staff to determine the zoning classifications. Commissioner Rowland disagreed, stating he felt county staff should develop the classification and then let the Board present their plan to city council who could then send to their staff for review. Mr. Conner noted that the process would be much shorter if city staff did not get involved at this point. The Board finally agreed that the city should retain control anywhere they provide service and that staff should prepare a report concerning the zoning classifications for the Board of Commissioners to present to city council.

Mr. Lytle briefly discussed the establishment of the zoning board of adjustment. The Board agreed they would serve as the board of adjustment in the beginning. Mr. Lytle stated that David Owens from the Institute of Government had agreed to hold a worksession about the guidelines for a board of adjustment if the Board wished to participate. The Board agreed by consensus that a worksession would be helpful.

Mr. Lytle then discussed creating an "Adequate Facilities Test" ordinance. He noted that it would take into consideration the impact a large development would have on schools and roads and allow the Board to reject such development through rezoning.

He asked the Board to consider establishing a moratorium on subdivisions over 50 lots to allow staff to develop the language and standards for something similar to an adequate facilities ordinance. He stated he felt the policy could be developed in sixty days. The Board asked Mr. Lytle to make a formal recommendation about the moratorium and its length at its February 16th meeting.

LANDFILL COLLECTIONS:

Don Conner reviewed reports on landfill collections for the past year. He noted that the new cell would be complete within thirty days.

Commissioner Blount asked Mr. Conner about the policy for cleaning Woodleaf Road. He stated he thought the Sheriff was using prisoners to clean the trash off of the road.

Mr. Conner stated that currently there was one deputy assigned part-time to work with Environmental Services to patrol Woodleaf Road. The Board asked the County Manager to work with the Sheriff on continual clean-up schedules and reporting.

Mr. Conner also discussed the recycling center and convenience sites. He noted that the site on Highway 29 would be closed by the end of 1998 due to the termination of the land lease with the State. He added that due to costs and the decrease in volume staff would like to eliminate one or two sites or cut the number of hours they were open per week.

The Board agreed by consensus for Mr. Conner to reduce the hours or days of operation for the convenience centers as needed.

PARKS:

Jim Foltz discussed the transfer of Baker's Creek Park to the City of Kannapolis. Commissioner Cohen stated he felt the County should transfer the park to Kannapolis at no cost and use the money previously appropriated for the park for the schools.

Mr. Foltz said he felt like the City of Kannapolis was beginning to accept the idea of hiring a parks director and taking Baker's Creek as a city park.

Commissioner Neely stated that he thought the process would be a two year transition and was concerned about stopping appropriations at the end of June.

Commissioner Tadlock stated that also wanted the transition to be smooth and for Kannapolis to be receptive. He added that he felt in order for that to work they would need a director to secure grants in order to survive.

Commissioner Rowland stated that the Board had voted last year to notify Kannapolis this would be the last year Rowan would fund Baker's Creek. He added that he had no problem if county staff worked with Kannapolis staff to get started and to work on grant applications.

Commissioner Blount noted that the County currently provides \$25,000 in funding and by providing in-kind services instead, the County could very well equal the appropriation amount.

Mr. Foltz told the Board he would bring information back to them on what it would take to make a smooth transition.

Commissioner Blount also asked Mr. Foltz about greenways, noting that they were part of the parks master plan. He stated he would like to begin developing a plan for a greenway system because he felt it would be easier to find donations of property once a plan was established.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS:

The Board discussed the transition of volunteer fire departments to the 800 trunking system. In a memorandum to the Board, Telecommunications Director Frank Thomason estimated the complete conversion to be approximately \$2.8 million dollars, with the minimal amount needed to begin the conversion being \$964,740. Mr. Russell noted that the fire departments were requesting the County participate by funding approximately 34% of the cost.

Commissioner Rowland stated he had a problem replacing radios that worked fine with a different system that would cost so much.

The other Board members stated they felt this conversion was necessary and Commissioner Blount suggested Mr. Russell come back to the Board with a phase-in plan for the radio conversion.

ADMINISTRATION:

The Board reviewed the revaluation schedule for 1999 and agreed that it would appoint a board of equalization and review as in previous years.

The Board also reviewed a request from Iredell County for maintenance of the dam structures in the Third Creek Watershed basin. Iredell County proposed paying for 70% of the cost with Rowan contributing 30%.

Commissioner Blount asked staff to develop a map marking the area that would be protected or which areas would flood and present it to the Board.

PUBLIC EDUCATION:

Dr. Joe McCann and school board member Bruce Jones joined the Board for their discussion on funding public education.

Mr. Russell reviewed the six issues outlined in a proposal for funding he presented to the Board. He stated that the money appropriated for the schools should be treated as an investment and should improve not just maintain the public schools.

The Board discussed the Class of 1999 plan with Dr. McCann and Mr. Jones. Dr. McCann stated that as of September, 42% of the 10th graders and 36% of the 12 graders would not meet the 2.0 requirement for graduation with a diploma.

Commissioner Tadlock stated he would prefer Rowan County to be the same as the other 99 counties and perhaps the school board should change the Class of 1999 requirements until it could determine if the other counties were willing to participate in a similar plan.

Commissioner Rowland stated that he had an open mind on an increase in funding for the schools and would like to bring the funding to state average but he added he would like for the school board to develop a plan showing how the funds would be spent. He then made a proposal for the Board of Commissioners to fund half the cost of an independent efficiency study to determine if funds were being used to their maximum extent. He noted that the study would show any waste or show that the school board was using the money in the best possible ways. The Board agreed by consensus to fund half of the study and Mr. Jones stated they would relay the request to the board of education.

Mr. Russell reviewed the funding proposal for capital outlay needs. He noted that the two basic ways revenues could be raised to cover the needs were through ad valorem taxes (including a general obligation bond referendum) or through a local option sales tax. He noted that the county would have to seek special legislation to be able to levy a \$0.01 sales tax for a ten year period.

Mr. Parks then asked Board members if they would support an increase for the schools if the efficiency study proved they were using their funds to the best extent. The Board agreed that the school board needed to develop a plan to show the result they expected to achieve through an increase in funding. They added that once that plan was presented the Board was committed to begin moving the appropriations to state average.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EDC Chairman Jake Alexander discussed his board's goals for the upcoming year with the Board.

Commissioner Rowland stated that he felt there was not as much friction between the two boards and asked about activity at the industrial park. Mr. Alexander noted that if the roads in the park could be completed it would enhance the marketability of the park and make it much easier to show to clients.

The board briefly discussed economic incentives with Mr. Alexander who noted that each company was different and it seemed to be more productive to work on a case by case basis.

Commissioner Neely asked about the possibility of working on a joint venture with the other municipalities to bring more retail businesses into the area. Mr. Alexander stated he felt it would be a good idea but that the EDC did not recruit retail industries only industrial. Commissioner Blount stated he felt retail industries could not be recruited because they located in an area only when all of the demographic data met their needs.

Commissioner Neely stated he would still like to have a meeting with one of the large retail developers to find out what Rowan County can do to attract retail business.

AIRPORT:

Mr. Russell reviewed the Transportation Improvement Plan for the airport and noted that one big project forthcoming was the relocation of the fuel farm which was required to be completed by December 1998.

Mr. Russell also discussed the sale of the t-hangars and noted how please he was with the success to date.

Commissioner Blount stated he would like to improve the appearance of the entrance to the airport from Airport Loop Road and asked Don Conner to determine what type of landscaping could be completed to improve the appearance.

BOARD OF ELECTIONS:

The Board discussed the need to update existing equipment, specifically the counters used at the precincts. They discussed the different types of election equipment that had been displayed at a recent meeting. Members agreed to ask the Board of Elections to present a report to the Board about the different technologies and the comparisons to the current punch-card type of system.

Mr. Russell noted that it would cost approximately \$1,000,000 to purchase new voting equipment and approximately \$225,00-250,000 to update the punch card tabulators.

Commissioner Neely stated he was concerned about the inaccuracies of the punch card tabulators, but Commissioner Cohen added that he felt many of the older citizens would be intimidated by electronic voting machines.

The Board agreed to ask for a report from the Board of Elections.

NORMAN'S BUILDING:

The Board discussed estimates and the possible use of the building to house probation. It was noted that architect Bill Burgin had estimated the renovations to cost approximately \$70/square foot. The Board reviewed the plans that had been designed for open space offices and noted that only 2 out of the 5 floors were usable.

Commissioner Blount suggested the Board wait on any plans for the building until it heard from an interested private investor about the purchase of surrounding buildings.

The Board also agreed to ask legislators to address an increase in court costs paid to the County in the next long legislative session. The Board also agreed to seek quotes for the completion of the second floor courtrooms in the Justice Center.

BRENDLE'S BUILDING:

The Board reviewed the schedule presented by Atkinson, Dyer & Watson. They agreed not to delay any plans while waiting to see what developed with Carolina Access and the Health Department.

SELF-INSURANCE:

Ken Deal reviewed the worker's compensation fund and the self-insurance liability fund with the Board. He noted how successful the programs had been to

date with \$1.3 million recognized in savings since the worker's compensation fund was started in 1992-93. The Board agreed to continue the programs in their current form.

ISSUES WITH THE CITY OF SALISBURY:

The Board listed issues they felt they would like to address in a joint meeting with the Salisbury City Council. The items listed were: annexation of the airport/possible revenue sharing; west rowan waterline volume; Salisbury's use of the landfill; ETJ/zoning; signs for the industrial park; and downtown parking.

WRAP-UP:

Mr. Parks asked each Board member to review the issues that had been discussed and try to rank their top three priorities.

Commissioner Tadlock – Education, South Rowan Library, VFD Radio System

Commissioner Cohen – Education, Radios, Voting Equipment

Commissioner Rowland – Education, Issues with the City/Property utilization, Health Department

Commissioner Neely – Education, Economic Development, Common issues with the City.

Commissioner Blount - Education, Control growth, South Rowan Library, Issues with the City.

The Board also agreed by consensus for the County Manager to send a letter to the School Board outlining the process necessary to begin implementation of the funding plan for this year's budget and to request a joint meeting if necessary.

There being no further business, Mr. Parks turned the meeting back over to Chairman Neely who adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kelly Dickinson, CMC
Clerk to the Board