

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
ROWAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

January 22, 2013 – 3:00 PM

J. NEWTON COHEN, SR. ROOM

J. NEWTON COHEN, SR. ROWAN COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
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Present: Jim Sides, Chairman
Craig Pierce, Vice-Chairman
Jon Barber, Member
Mike Caskey, Member
Chad Mitchell, Member

County Manager Gary Page, Clerk to the Board Carolyn Barger and Finance Director Leslie Heidrick were present.

Chairman Sides convened the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

Commissioner Pierce provided the Invocation and also led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Barber moved, Commissioner Pierce seconded and the vote to approve the agenda passed unanimously.

OPENING REMARKS / CHAIRMAN SIDES

Chairman Sides said the meeting would be informal and that he would like for the Commissioners to share initiatives they would like to see go forth. Chairman Sides then turned the floor over to County Manager Gary Page.

Mr. Page said he would like for the Board members to each share three (3) or four (4) ideas as to what they wanted to see happen over the next year. Mr. Page said the ideas would provide him with a target as to how much money would be needed to address those initiatives. Mr. Page said he, too, had several items to share.

Chairman Sides asked each Commissioner to limit their comments to fifteen minutes and after all members had an opportunity to speak, additional time could be granted, if necessary.

1. DISCUSSION REGARDING 2013-14 BUDGET

Commissioner Mitchell asked if there were any estimates as to how the County's revenues were playing out at the halfway point in the budget year. Based on current revenues, Finance Director Leslie Heidrick said the projection was to hopefully add \$500,000 to Fund Balance.

Commissioner Mitchell said he would like to see the bond cost for Rowan Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) roll over to the continuing budget and keep the tax rate at least where it is now.

Commissioner Mitchell said he would like for the County to implement a plan for moving the Board of Elections (BOE) from its current location.

Commissioner Mitchell asked Mr. Page if there were any capital improvements on the horizon for the 2013-14 budget. Mr. Page said once the Telecommunications Department was moved to its new facility, there would probably be a push from the district attorney, judges and sheriff for the 2,500 square feet of empty space. Mr. Page said there might be some costs associated with dividing up the office space.

Commissioner Mitchell said he heard that courtroom space was needed again. Mr. Page said there was a need for a larger place for the grand jury to meet. Mr. Page said he needed to move a judge to address the problem and it was not a popular conversation.

Commissioner Mitchell discussed cost of living adjustments and said he did not want to see across the board raises. Commissioner Mitchell said he would rather see a tiered plan implemented to work up from the bottom of the pay scale.

Chairman Sides said there would be some challenges to pay for projects, some recurring, without a tax increase.

Commissioner Pierce concurred with Commissioner Mitchell of the need to move the BOE. Commissioner Pierce said the BOE could use the additional space for training purposes, as well as an early voting station.

Commissioner Caskey felt the two (2) vacant buildings previously occupied by the Department of Social Services (DSS) should be used by county staff or be offered for use by outside entities.

Mr. Page explained that the County had not marketed or tried to sell the buildings. Mr. Page said at some point when the airport runway was extended, the West Innes Street facility might be needed to house the Maintenance Department. Mr. Page said until that time, the building could possibly be used to house the Board of Education or possibly as an incubator building for businesses. Mr. Page said the Commissioners would know more after

discussions took place on February 4 regarding the proposed central office for the school system.

Chairman Sides agreed the Board of Elections should be moved. Chairman Sides said there were over 40 elections precincts and for each precinct there must be voting machines, staff, etc. Chairman Sides said Commissioner Mitchell had shared with him the idea of super precincts, which would drastically reduce the number of needed precincts. Chairman Sides said moving the Board of Elections depended on the Board of Education's decision for a central office. Chairman Sides said if the Board of Education did not want the buildings for office space, the County could move forward with putting the Board of Elections and business incubator in one building and selling the other building.

Commissioner Barber agreed the Board of Elections should be moved. Commissioner Barber said he was still committed to the Commissioners decision to provide the Board of Education with \$6 million for a central office building.

Commissioner Mitchell said the business incubator would add a nice piece to Rowan County's economic development tools. Commissioner Mitchell said he would like to get the Economic Development Commission (EDC) Director, Robert Van Geons involved regardless of where the business incubator would be located. Commissioner Mitchell said he would like to see a plan presented to get the business incubator up and going.

Chairman Sides agreed with Commissioner Mitchell and said the Board did not have to vote on the issue and could have the County Manager contact Mr. Van Geons with the Board's direction.

Commissioner Pierce said he would like to see the EDC on the same site as the incubator business as a way to promote the idea.

Commissioner Caskey said he was in favor of trying to give employees a raise. Commissioner Caskey also supported trying to put resource officers in the schools.

Commissioner Caskey said he was not in favor of a tax increase and other than the items mentioned, there were a few things he would like to add if funds were available.

Commissioner Pierce presented a concept to implement a one-cent sales tax for the County and to earmark $\frac{1}{4}$ cent of the tax for capital needs. Commissioner Pierce said short of raising property taxes, there was no way to fund needed capital improvements. Commissioner Pierce felt the sales tax would be a more fair way to offset costs and to fund capital improvements. Commissioner Pierce said the $\frac{1}{4}$ cent could be used to make the West Rowan EMS Station a permanent site and would also help pay to establish a station in eastern Rowan

County. Commissioner Pierce said he would like for the municipalities to be able to participate and use the sales tax revenue at their discretion.

Commissioner Pierce explained that the ¼ cent sales tax would help absorb construction costs for Rowan Cabarrus Community College (RCCC) and prevent a property tax increase.

Commissioner Pierce said another initiative he would like considered is to investigate an early retirement program for county employees.

Commissioner Barber pointed out that the County could be competing with other tax reform. Commissioner Barber said the Board would have to pass a resolution and ask the County's local legislative delegation to put the matter on the ballot for the citizens to decide.

Mr. Page added that the Board could also ask for a bill to enact the sales tax without a vote of the people.

Commissioner Mitchell said the sales tax increase was a basic overall plan to create a capital plan and he would be receptive to discussions. Commissioner Mitchell said the Board could not dictate to future boards how to use the funds and the ¼ cent could eventually be directed to other expenses.

Commissioner Caskey said he was not in favor of raising taxes and while it was a good plan, he could not support it.

Chairman Sides said the proposed sales tax issue was also on the agenda for the Board's 6:00 p.m. meeting. Chairman Sides said he was not prepared to vote on the matter today. If he were to support the proposed tax, Chairman Sides said it would be because the subject would ultimately be decided by taxpayers.

Commissioner Barber said he had five (5) issues to present and two (2) of them had already been discussed (employee recognition and tax increase). Commissioner Barber said school security was the third issue. Commissioner Barber said there were discussions taking place with the Sheriff and the school system concerning school safety and he felt the Commissioners should be involved in those discussions.

Fourthly, Commissioner Barber felt the County should develop a partnership to end homelessness for veterans in Rowan County. Lastly, Commissioner Barber recommended that a nutrition committee be formed to see if the County could assist in a child nutrition program. Commissioner Barber said the Department of Agriculture had a program where local school districts worked with farmers to provide fresh fruits and vegetables for children.

Commissioner Barber said no one should be homeless, especially veterans, and he asked that the Board put together a committee to explore ways to address the issue. Commissioner Barber said one possible use for the former DSS building could be housing units for homeless veterans.

After a brief discussion concerning the formation of committees, Chairman Sides said he would appoint very few committees over the next eleven (11) months. Chairman Sides agreed some of the issues mentioned by Commissioner Barber were worthy of possible study and he gave his blessing to Commissioner Barber to form any committee to meet with schools, veterans, etc. Chairman Sides said he would not tell parents what their children could eat and he would not appoint people to functions they would not show up for. Chairman Sides said it was incumbent upon each Commissioner to provide substantive information to the Board in order to move projects forward. Chairman Sides said a Commissioner could take the initiative to attend every meeting on school security, child nutrition, etc. and when a group had important information to bring before the Board, the Board would listen.

Chairman Sides said the County needed a new capital improvement plan and that he would like to incorporate a new capital needs plan from Rowan Salisbury School System (RSSS), including the capital needs of RSSS current buildings.

Chairman Sides said he would like to revise the County's funding policy for nonprofits and include the volunteer fire departments (VFD). Chairman Sides said there had been some question in the past as to whether the VFD were subject to the open meetings law and he wished to clarify in writing that if VFD received money from the County, they would be subject to the open meetings law. Chairman Sides said he would be glad to make the changes to the funding policy.

Chairman Sides also discussed the Early College Program in Rowan County, which was legislatively established. Chairman Sides said the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between RCCC and RSSS for the program was up for renewal in June of 2013. Chairman Sides said there were 400 students in the program and each year approximately 100 students lost out on an opportunity to attend. Chairman Sides continued by saying he planned to research the possibility of another early college program, perhaps through Catawba or Livingstone College. Chairman Sides said he would bring additional information back to the Board.

Chairman Sides discussed security for the Administration Building and said he would like to see swipe pads placed at the doors to eliminate the use of keys.

Chairman Sides expressed hope that Mr. Page would remain with the County for another 5 to 10 years; however, he felt the County should consider hiring an assistant county manager to help with the transition when the time came that Mr.

Page wished to retire. Chairman Sides asked the Board to think about creating the position and said he would present more information later. Chairman Sides also suggested that the Board consider changing the Administrative Secretary's title to Deputy Clerk so that she could fill in during the Clerk's absence.

Chairman Sides discussed the possibility of allowing certain non-profits to be on the County's medical insurance plan. Chairman Sides said he was not suggesting the option be open to everyone but rather to smaller organizations with 7 or 8 people. Chairman Sides used the Rescue Squad (Squad) as an example and said the monies from the insurance savings the Squad would incur could be redirected elsewhere. Chairman Sides said if the Squad was put on the County's insurance, the savings would be approximately \$50,000 per year and the savings could be put in a fund for a replacement plan for vehicles/equipment. Chairman Sides said if the Squad was allowed to be on the County's insurance plan, the Squad members would have to pay for their dependent coverage. Chairman Sides said he would provide information later.

Commissioner Mitchell shared several comments regarding the Early College Program and Governor McCroy's plans. Commissioner Mitchell said the possibilities were limitless for taking advantage of the high school diploma system.

Chairman Sides said he did not want to be perceived as trying to run the school board's business. Chairman Sides felt the Program was an area where Rowan County could show its concern about education.

Commissioner Pierce was in agreement the County needed an updated Capital Improvement Plan and Commissioner Caskey said he favored the idea of offering the County's insurance to smaller non-profits.

In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Barber, Chairman Sides said the County would set the boundaries for the non-profits that would be allowed to participate in the County's insurance plan. Chairman Sides said he was not including the VFD at this time; however, it was on the radar to be discussed in the future.

Commissioner Barber questioned the VFD adhering to the open meetings law and Chairman Sides said there were differing opinions between lawyers as to whether the law applied to the VFD. Chairman Sides said if the VFD did not sign the Funding Policy for Non-Profits, the County would not fund them.

2. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner Mitchell moved to adjourn at 5:20 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Pierce and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carolyn Barger, CMC, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board/
Assistant to the County Manager