

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners held a Board Workshop on Monday, February 17, 2020 at 12 noon in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss capital projects, facility assessment planning, upcoming budget, personnel and service contracts.

Members Present: Martha Hicks, Chair; Tim Phillips, Vice-Chair; Dennis Aldridge; Blake Vance; Wood Hall Young, Jr.

Members Absent: None

Call To Order

Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

Phillip Barrier, County Manager, explained that the projected tax value was \$3,776,000,000 which is an 89 million dollar growth. These are not final numbers just a projection. This would equate to \$410,000 in growth for ad valorem and \$59,000 in fire tax. We have sent out the full budget package to the department heads which is due at the end of this month. We will be sitting down with all the departments beginning March 9th and going over each department's budget. We plan on beginning the budget workshops on April 30th. If we can have the last budget meeting on May 18th then we can present the budget at the first meeting in June.

Tim Greene, Finance Officer, updated the Board on the debt service. We have a Q zab loan on the high school. This payment is \$110,000. We just did our high school loan on 11 million dollars. We will pay a yearly payment of \$1,087,004. This will be budgeted.

Dennis Aldridge stated "as we go into the budget process, we have spent a considerable sum of change, all worthy, but I really think we should add back some to the fund balance. That should be a goal. If you don't have that focus it goes away and all of a sudden you think wow. We are in a positive growth cycle and while we are in the growth cycle and having income growth we need to bank some of that while it is coming in rather than trying to chase after it."

Wood Hall Young, Jr. questioned if extra payments could be made on the high school loan. Mr. Greene answered that no extra payments could be made for the first three years.

Mr. Barrier stated that \$55,000 was spent for nonprofits in this budget year. Do we want to proceed as we did in the last budget year? Mr. Phillips said that he thought that was a source of disagreement last year. Mr. Aldridge stated that he thought the initial

application process should be streamlined because it put quite a burden on the nonprofit at the beginning with no assurance of any gains from it.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated that we need to go over each application and there is no use in making them put in applications if we are going to fund the same ones over and over.

There was considerable discussion regarding funding of nonprofits.

Phillip Barrier, Jr., County Manager, went over the list of nonprofits that the Board wanted to fund, i.e., Yellow Mountain \$25,000; Blue Ridge Partnership for Children \$5,000; Chamber of Commerce \$5,000; Little League \$2,500; Drug Court \$15,000; Shrine Club \$2,500. These nonprofits will need to submit the one page application. \$20,000 will be allocated for the other nonprofits that will need to fill out the full application and the Board will decide during the budget process how this money will be allocated.

Facility Assessment Planning

Mr. Barrier stated that Jeff Jaynes had been pushing for a facility assessment. I had the tax office to run some reports with the buildings that we own with the school board and we made a list of existing facilities. I have asked Boomerang to give me a price of doing a facility assessment plan. This would be a plan that would tell us things like when we would need a new roof on a building or a new boiler. Tim Phillips questioned if the county maintenance department could not do something like that. Dennis Aldridge said consulting was a term that sometimes meant giving money for nothing. He said before he would agree to that he would have to have a very firm figure. Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated that the buildings needed to be on a maintenance rotation. Mr. Barrier will get with maintenance to get a maintenance schedule completed for the buildings.

Capital Projects

Mr. Barrier went over a list of capital projects that had been completed.

Mr. Barrier also went over some FY 20-21 considerations. He stated that there has been a communication radio problem going on in the county. We are currently working on a lease agreement for a tower here in Newland. We have money in the budget to update that tower. The owner does not want to sell it. We will buy new equipment before July 1, 2020. Mr. Vance asked if we felt good about this assessment from the radio vendor. Mr. Aldridge said that he was a skeptic when this was first presented. Woodie and I went to High Country Communications and spent about three hours looking at the proposal. It made a lot more sense. The real kicker with all of this is electronics. We can never be ahead of the curve. The way Jamey and Chris was talking this makes sense over time. Mr. Young said there are still going to be places in the county that are not going to be as reachable as we would like for it to be.

There was discussion about some other considerations for capital projects in the 2020/2021 budget.

Recess

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.

Chair Hicks declared the meeting to be back in session after a brief recess.

Mr. Barrier said he had talked several years about relocating the probation offices and that relocating the DSS offices would help free up some space in the administration building. On March 3, 2020 the North Carolina Department of Social Services state staff will be here. I would like to take them to the Cannon Building that is for sale and let them look at the building. The asking price is \$419,000. The one thing with the funding is the county would pay 40% and the DSS from the state would pay 60%. We could get 28 people in the building but they need 34 offices to get everyone under one roof. Wood Hall Young, Jr. said that the state has not passed a budget yet and it is my understanding from the last DSS meeting that if the governor's plan for Medicaid Expansion passes it is going to increase Avery County to the extent that they will need five more employees to cover. There was discussion regarding the size of the building.

There was discussion about putting a device on the doors at the Administration Building to make them automated. Mr. Barrier said there was an estimate from maintenance of \$3,400. Consensus by the Board to go ahead and fix the front doors at the Administration Building.

Tim Phillips said at some point in time we need to start putting some money back to build a new recreation center on the property. Just think about it this. Blake Vance concurred.

Dennis Aldridge said that he thought this would be a good year to put the brakes on capital projects.

Personnel

Blake Vance stated that he was unaware until recently of the starting pay of our EMS employees and he felt that there needed to be an adjustment to their pay. Starting pay is at \$12.55 an hour. Tim Phillips said that he did not have a problem with that either. Mr. Vance said he had talked to Mike and had done some research and he would like to recommend that these employees be reclassified to show an adjustment of 10%. Mr. Vance explained a handout with comparisons of other county owned EMS services. Wood Hall Young, Jr. said that Mitchell County contracts theirs and they spend more than we do and we own ours. Mr. Phillips said people that live here and work here care more about the people than contractors would. We are going to have better people and better retention. Tim Greene said that this would need to stay in line with the pay grade system so he would look at raising the pay grades if that is what the Board wanted to do. Mr. Young and Mr. Vance asked that it err on the high side when looking at the pay grades. Consensus by a majority of the Board to include this in the budget process.

Mr. Vance said he would like to propose to change the policy for elected officials like the Sheriff and Register of Deeds so that when they retired after three terms and are 55 that

they be included on the county's insurance. There was discussion regarding this. Chair Hicks said this is something to think about and it will be discussed in future meetings. Mr. Young said the County Manager is driving a 2008 vehicle and he needs a vehicle. It needs to be an SUV not a small car. This will be included in the budget.

Mr. Young also asked that uniforms for Communications be included in the budget and training also be researched.

Service Contracts

Mr. Barrier stated that the contract for lawn care service is up in July. I am going to bid this out. There will be some other properties added to this.

Eric Foster, Solid Waste Director, explained that the request for proposals for municipal waste went out for bid and we opened them on February 3rd. We got one back from City of Bristol and one from the Foothills in Lenoir. The City of Bristol contract price is \$17.30 per ton plus \$0.15 per ton DEQ fee. This is the first year and it goes up every year until year 5 at \$18.70 per ton plus \$0.15 per ton DEQ fee.

Foothills contract price is \$23.50 per ton plus the CPI increase.

Mr. Young asked how much time is still left at the landfill for C&D. Mr. Foster stated approximately 1.5 years.

Mr. Aldridge asked when the landfill cannot take any more C&D how much will that add to the hauling. Mr. Foster said it would add about 25%.

Mr. Foster stated that he would get the contract with Bristol and send it to Michaelle Poore, County Attorney for approval and then it would be brought to the Board for approval.

Adjourn

Motion by Blake Vance and second by Wood Hall Young, Jr. to adjourn this meeting at 3:05 p.m. Motion unanimously approved (5-0).

Martha Hicks, Chair
Avery County Board of Commissioners

Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk