

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners held a Budget Workshop on Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the Fiscal Year 2020/2021 Budget with the Avery County Fire Commission; Avery Sheriff's Office; and Avery County Board of Education.

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

Members Absent: None

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Governor Cooper's Executive Order No. 121 issued on March 27, 2020 limiting mass gatherings to no more than 10 people at a time, the public was not allowed to attend the meeting in person. The meeting was broadcast live and recorded on the Avery County Youtube Channel.

Call To Order

Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.
Chair Hicks called the roll with all board members present.
Chair Hicks led prayer.

Avery Fire Commission

Scott Heath, Chair of the Avery County Fire Commission, explained that there had been some organizational changes with the Fire Commission staff. Jeffrey Thompson had been hired for the Fire Department Coordinator, Brian Ledford had been hired for the assistant coordinator and Misty Johnson had been hired as the bookkeeper. This helps with segregation of duties.

Recess

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess due to technical difficulties with the livestreaming.
Chair Hicks called the meeting back to order after a brief recess.

Mr. Heath explained that the departments had been working on their ISO ratings which helped with homeowners lower insurance rates. It is also a benchmark and proof that this is what we are getting for our fire tax money. It justifies the fire tax. It also justifies the full time employees and rover positions that we have. The ratings are a lot of work and there has to be proper documentation.

As far as the budget is concerned, we have presented a budget on what the county has said that the fire tax would generate. We worked on this budget for several days. We are keeping up with the fund balances that the fire departments currently have and we have had them take out of their fund balance and get them down to between \$10,000 and \$30,000.

Shane Garland, Fire Commission member, stated that the fire commission was working on a training facility. That is one thing that is a requirement. There was a training facility at Mayland Community College but Mayland refused to put any money into it and the facility went away. We are setting aside some money for a training facility. This is one of our goals. We are

currently looking at surplus property that the county owns to see if any of that property meets the specs.

Mr. Heath thanked the commissioners for their support of the fire commission and the fire departments.

Recess

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.

Chair Hicks called the meeting back to order after a brief recess.

Avery Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Kevin Frye spoke regarding the budget for the Avery Sheriff's Office. In the past there has been an issue with cuts being made and we don't even know what the cuts are. We need to set down prior to that and work out the budget so we know what they expect and what we need. Sheriff Frye stated that there had been cuts of \$86,586 out of different line items in his proposed budget. He talked to Phillip and Ashley and had asked them if he went back through his proposed budget and made \$86,586 dollars in cuts in different line items as long as it was equal to the \$86,586 could we do that and they had said yes. So we have went through our budget and cut these. We have the same amount of cuts for the total budget. There was discussion about some of the uniforms and equipment that needed to stay in the budget.

We have some things that my staff has worked on that we are asking for you to look at but not necessarily do this year.

There was discussion regarding the medical expenses for the jail. Dennis Aldridge asked that the process for the Prime Company that does the "scrubbing" didn't seem to show any savings. Sheriff Frye stated that it is savings it is averaging about a 25-30% savings. We pay a percentage of what we save. They don't make anything unless they save us money. For example, we were billed \$800.14. They cut it down to \$560.00. They saved us \$240.04. They charged us \$45.00.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated we have budgeted \$125,000 dollars for medical expenses. Chair Hicks stated that out of that \$125,000 dollars, \$65,000 was paid for the nurse that comes to the jail. Mr. Young questioned whether Toe River Health District might be able to do this. Sheriff Frye said that they did not have the staff to do this that he had spoken with them about it. Sheriff Frye said that if we didn't have the nurse the medical bills would be upwards of a ½ million dollars. Mr. Young questioned what would be a close number for the medical expense. Sheriff Frye stated that it would be \$100,000 plus the \$65,000 for the Southern Health Partners.

There was discussion regarding a pay scale that would provide merit or certification allowances. Sheriff Frye said he would like for the Commissioners to consider this in the future. Chair Hicks thanked the Sheriff for his services and his departments services.

Recess

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.

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

Avery County Board of Education

Dr. Dan Brigman, Superintendent of Avery County Board of Education, thanked the Board for their support and leadership. The Covid 19 has been unlike anything that we have seen in the

school system. We are looking at school schedule changes. We could be starting school as early as the last week of July.

This budget that we have presented has been developed with no drastic expansions. The list of items that we have included is all inclusive. We felt the need to share them with you all for future reference. We did not come expecting to get the full capital funded. We are asking for money for universal pre-Kindergarten.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated that he would like to know what the plans are for the school calendar. He said that he had several upset people calling him. Dr. Brigman stated that the original plan was a nontraditional calendar that would start August 6th and this was approved. The General Assembly stuck in some stipulations in the law on May 3rd making that calendar null and void. In the new law they gave Boards of Education four options. The first one is an August 17th start date which is a traditional calendar; second option is something considered a year around calendar and in the year round calendar there are three options. The first one is a five 9 week calendar. We determined that would not be good for Avery County. The second version would be a track calendar which you split the student body up into four specific tracks and that would be a childcare nightmare for us. The third option is a 45/15 calendar. The kids come for 9 weeks and get off 2 weeks, etc. There is a lot of misinformation. That calendar option along with the traditional is the one's we are looking at.

Jeff Jaynes, Finance Officer for Avery County Board of Education, explained that the total estimated budget for next year is 5.8 million dollars; 4.7 million is what you appropriated last year and the rest comes from grants and other sources. We are asking for a \$70,000 dollar increase in the allocation for pre-Kindergarten. We are asking so we don't have to turn people away. Having a universal pre-K makes us \$70,000 short. There are five pre-K's one at each elementary school. Mr. Jaynes went over the operational budget line items.

Mr. Jaynes explained the list of capital items that had been presented to the Board. This is an entire list of our capital needs that were sent in by our staff. This list is in priority order. There was discussion regarding the capital items. Mr. Jaynes stated that 70-75% of the capital projects for the present fiscal year are underway or completed. We know have a wrecker.

There was discussion regarding the air conditioning at Avery Middle School. There was discussion regarding the HVAC at Freedom Trail and Cranberry Middle. The backup system is dead. The second system is running at 70% capacity. If that system goes down it can be down for a couple of days.

Chair Hicks thanked Dr. Brigman and Jeff Jaynes for the updates.

Recess

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.

Chair Hicks called the meeting back into order after a brief recess.

There was discussion about the operational budget for the school system. The \$4,770,000 would include the \$70,000 for universal pre-K. Consensus by the Board to fund the \$4,770,000.

There was discussion regarding the capital budget for the school system. It was decided by the Board to fund \$750,000 for the capital items and the county will fund \$205,000 out of this year's fund balance. We will do budget amendment in the June meeting with the understanding that

we will split the cost with the two schools; Avery Middle School (air conditioning) and Cranberry Middle School (HVAC).

Mr. Barrier stated that he needed to make the Board aware of a correction. There were two new positions from DSS included in the revenue but not included in the expense line item but the budget is still balanced. The state pays 50% of the salaries.

With this proposed budget, the tax rate will stay the same at 0.48 cents for ad valorem and 0.07 cents for the fire tax. The proposed budget is balanced. A public hearing will take place on the budget on June 1, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Blake Vance to adjourn this meeting at 10:15 p.m. Motion unanimous. (Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge---Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye

Martha Hicks, Chair
Avery County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST: _____
Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk