

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners held a Budget Workshop on Thursday, May 17, 2018 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Fiscal Year 2018/2019 budget with the Avery County Fire Commission; Avery County Sheriff's Office; and Avery County Board of Education.

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

Members Absent: None

**Call To Order**

Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.  
Chair Hicks led prayer.

**Avery County Fire Commission**

Bill Beuttell, Chairman of the Avery County Fire Commission, stated that four of the five commission members are present at this meeting. In looking over the budget, we spent quite a bit of time trying to glean the requests of the different departments. We started off about a million and a half over what the anticipated revenue was. We tried to get as close to revenue neutral as we could based on conversations with the County Manager. We came up with a budget of 2.610 million dollars. We are asking the county commissioners not to raise the fire tax or lower the fire tax but keep it where it is. Some of the things we are doing this year we are still on track to purchase one tanker . We were buying two a year but because of budget constraints we cut that back to one. We have used some of the savings to hire some additional full time employees. We are looking at some savings that we could put into the program and this year we are instituting a greater life insurance benefits program for volunteer and staff. This is part of what we are trying to do to increase volunteerism with the younger members of the county. We joined the membership of AirMed Company where if any member of the fire departments or families get seriously injured and have to be flown that it would be paid for through the membership. We had hoped that we could hire some night time staff but we did not have any additional money to do that. Just to clear the air on the budget there had been some allegations that we had one million dollars in fund balance and that was incorrect we have \$200,000 to \$300,000 in fund balance. There are some allegations that are going around about the fire commission having secret meetings, we don't do that. We take this responsibility very seriously. We try to run a tight ship. We have given numerous opportunities to the chiefs to come to us and explain to us why the fund mechanism is inadequate and how it needs to be tweaked. I have yet to get a phone call, memo or email regarding that. Jim Brooks is the secretary for the fire association.

Mr. Brooks stated that he takes minutes at the chief's meeting and minutes at the fire association and nothing like this has come up. I try to bring the things from the fire association meeting to the fire commission meeting and vice versa. In the past couple of years we have been taking advantage of \$30,000 grants. Each department gets \$30,000 for grants. All of the fire departments except for one have received the state grant.

Mr. Beuttell said given his personal opinion over the past six weeks, he still supported the fire and emergency services 100% and knew that a lot of the allegations were political and holds no vendetta. I am here to serve you and the taxpayers of the county.

A handout was given to the commissioners on the fund balances that the fire departments have from year to year. Charlie Franklin stated that this is what the fire departments have provided to me. This is the beginning bank balance for July 1 of each year. Mr. Beuttell stated when we allocate money to each department at the end of the year they flip that over to a fund balance. Mr. Franklin stated that the departments needed to keep between \$10,000 and \$15,000 dollars in their fund balance. Mr. Beuttell said that they have to have a savings account. This is just public money. The commissioners have been very understanding and bumped up the fire tax from 6.7 to 7 cents. If you leave it where it is, hopefully that will maintain us.

Blake Vance stated that the fire commission members are volunteers and they want to be here.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. said that an Elk Park volunteer came to him and asked why they couldn't get more than \$500 for medical supplies. I asked Charlie Franklin this and I think the real answer is lack of communication. I wonder if all of the volunteers know this. Johnny Mathes stated that it is up to whoever uses it to get this off of the EMS truck.

Mr. Beuttell stated that the chiefs do not have to come and beg us for the money they just have to ask. It is a very simple process. Johnny Mathes said if a fire department has \$57,000 in the fund balance how are you going to run out of money for fuel?

Chair Hicks said that she appreciated what the fire commission did and she was not going to do away with the fire commission.

There was discussion about the lack of volunteers and how difficult it is to get certified.

Mr. Beuttell stated that he wanted to be on record that there was no money missing.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. stated that he would not do away with the fire commission because of the job that they do and they take all of this off of the commissioners.

Corey Hughes said that he was asked by the fire departments to be part of the fire commission. I called Bill Beuttell and asked him about the fire commission and told him I

was interested about being a member because the fire departments wanted me to be and told him I am honest and vote for what is right, prudent and fair and to this day that is exactly what I did. Whenever I first came on the board we were talking about caring for our men and since I got on the board we got a retirement plan in place. The money has gone up. Over the last several years this has been the best board according to the fire departments that they have seen come through and never any problems until this past election and then it decided to go south because of a candidate or two and going from praises being sung to now people act like I am the plague. You wanted me here and now you want me gone. I am part of a board that questioned that money was missing. Even though they are going to find out there is not money missing I am going to be tagged as a board that money was missing. I have that reputation now. This thing about secret meetings; they know that we are governed by law and we give up free time to be on this board. Give me a break on all of these lies. I am really tired about being lied about.

Blake Vance said that any process needs a look every once in a while but I don't question the integrity or honesty of anyone that is on the fire commission.

### **Recess**

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.

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

### **Avery County Sheriff's Office and Jail Budget—Troy Cook; Lee Buchanan**

A budget book for the Avery County Sheriff's Office was presented to each commissioner by Troy Cook, Chief Deputy for the Avery County Sheriff's Office. Mr. Cook questioned if the grants had been included in the budget? Nancy Johnson, Finance Officer, said we included the grants that we know about.

Mr. Cook explained extensively the budget line items.

Several line items were discussed by the board.

The line item for training was discussed. The Def/tech school is an expensive school to go to but is very important. Until we get someone certified we cannot buy or deploy the distraction devices. One person would go to the school for training and gets certified and then he will come back and train the rest of the department.

The budget discussion for the Avery County Sheriff's Office was continued until later in the meeting because the Board of Education was scheduled to meet at 7:00 p.m.

### **Recess**

Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.

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

## **Avery County Board of Education**

John Greene, Chairman of the Avery County Board of Education, thanked the Board of Commissioners for all of their support for the children of Avery County.

Dr. Bryan Taylor presented a power point presentation. Currently we serve 1929 students K-12. We serve 100 Pre-K students. We operate 5 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, one high school and one alternative school. We serve 355 students with special needs and 150 English Language learners. 59% of the student population receive free or reduced lunch. We have 538 employees, 348 of which are full time. We currently operate 27 yellow buses. We transport 59% of our enrollment per day. That is 1736 miles a day and we use about 500 gallons of diesel per day. Child nutrition serves 2450 meals per day.

Challenges we are currently facing is salary increases from 2 to 6-8%. While the state will cover that salary increase for state funded employees we will continue with some locally funded employees we will be responsible for. There will also be an increase in retirement contribution and increase in employee insurance. Some additional challenges are gas prices going up and utilities increasing.

Dr. Taylor stated that possibly the \$250,000 that we are saving in capital outlay could be paired with the 1.7 million that we talked about which would give us 2 million dollars to begin the high school.

On the current expense side we are looking at an increase of \$140,500 or 3% and that increase will allow us to address the increases in personnel and operations that I highlighted earlier. Our total request is actually going to be a net reduction of \$109,500 from the taxpayers of Avery County. In conclusion, I have to be honest and tell you that as the superintendent I have to advocate for the students of Avery County and I do hesitate to ask for less money but I understand the big picture and we are willing to do what we can to work with you to be good stewards. I would respectfully ask that you accept our proposed budget.

Dr. Taylor explained the Capital Outlay budget which is broken down into ongoing projects, annual projects, and the \$750,000 also includes the computer payment and turf payment. Other needs are broken down into safety and/or code requirements, efficiency and other. We have prioritized our list. The last couple of pages are the current expense side.

Chair Hicks asked if putting off some things that need to be done is going to cause problems on down the line. Dr. Taylor said we have looked at the safety issues and things that are very pressing. There is nothing that we left out that we cannot address in a timeframe.

Blake Vance stated that it was his understanding that we would continue with the climate control at the middle school. Steve Smith stated that we are trying to do it every other year so it would give us a chance to see if this is the design that we want to

go with. Jeff Jaynes stated that we are presently not finished with this project because it had to be broken down into two years.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. asked if there were going to be several people retiring this year. Dr. Taylor said that there will be some retiring, we will eliminate some positions but not eliminate all of the retirements and resignations that we have. That is why that number is not larger than what it is. Every decision that we make will be in the best interest of the children. Blake Vance asked about the local supplement. Dr. Taylor said that was typically 3%.

**Avery County Sheriff's Office and Jail—continued**

Troy Cook continued the discussion on the line items in the Sheriff's budget. Wood Hall Young, Jr. questioned how much the salary would be for a Resource Officer. Troy Cook stated it would be approximately \$50,000.

Troy Cook went over a list of the current vehicles that the Sheriff's Office has and the mileage of each vehicle.

Mr. Young stated that he had a problem with grant money that we are going to get being added into the budget for money that we provide. It sounds like you are padding the budget. If it is grant money and you know that you are going to get it I don't think it should be added into the budget. Mr. Cook stated that he did not understand that either. Mr. Young stated anything that you can get as far as a grant needs to be above and beyond what the county provides.

There was discussion regarding adding two additional deputies. Lee Buchanan said currently there are 12 road deputies. There are two deputies on each shift; day shift works 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; night shift works 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. The sergeant comes in at noon and works until midnight and then the split shift comes in at 2:00 p.m. and works until 2:00 a.m. Last year there were 7900 calls. We have had a 33% increase since 2005. That is only 911 calls and does not include civil papers.

There was extensive discussion on the budget line items for the jail.

Blake Vance stated that it really "burned" him that we have to budget \$200,000 for medical expenses for criminals. There was discussion about medical expenses for inmates and discussion about inmate medical insurance. The next budget meeting will be held on May 21, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.

**Adjourn**

**Chair Hicks declared the meeting to be adjourned at 9:22 p.m.**

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**Martha Hicks, Chair**  
**Avery County Board of Commissioners**

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk

