

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
January 3, 2023

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, January 3, 2023 at 5:08 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Stoney Greene, Commissioner Eddie Settle, Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson, and Commissioner Bill Sexton.

Also present for the meeting were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Keith Elmore welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at this time.

INVOCATION – Vice Chairman Stoney Greene led the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chairman Keith Elmore led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Elmore said with the consent of the Board item D will be removed from the Agenda, Choate Construction does not have the amendment ready. Consensus was given by the Board.

WILKES COUNTY JUVENILE CRIME PREVENTION (JCPC):

1. BOARD MEMBER APPOINTMENT – Chairman Elmore welcomed Jane Casarez from JCPC. Ms. Casarez thanked the Board and stated the Wilkes County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council would like to recommend Ginger Gardiner for a 2-year term appointment. This is to fill the vacancy created by Edward Smith on their board as the Mental Health Representative from Daymark Recovery Center. The application has been received.

Commissioner Eddie Settle made a motion to appoint Ginger Gardiner to the JCPC Board for a 2-year term as requested and presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene and unanimously approved.

2. RESOLUTION SUPPORTING COMPRESSION INCREASES FOR DIVISION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION DETENTION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER STAFF – Ms. Casarez stated the Wilkes County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council is requesting the Boards support for a Resolution for compression increases for the Department of Juvenile Justice Detention and Youth Development Center Staff. They understand they do not have a Youth Development Center or a Youth Detention Center in Wilkes, but the vacancies across the state are having a direct impact. She added the Wilkes County DJJ Staff are impacted and requested to go and fill in for the vacancies. Many of the Juvenile Court Counselors are going after their work day to fill in at the Detention Center in Alexander and beyond. They are also being asked to work their day shift at those Detention Centers and still do their case work. Ms. Casarez added this is affecting

how they perform their duties for the youth of Wilkes County. They are asking the Board to support this and sign the Resolution.

Chairman Elmore asked if these are state employees. Ms. Casarez replied Juvenile Court Counselors are considered state employees. Chairman Elmore added this is a request for the state and a conversation they need to have with them. Ms. Casarez replied yes. Chairman Elmore stated this Board does not generally do these types of Resolutions. The key word in this Resolution is adequate pay, he supports everyone getting adequate pay for their work. Commissioner Casey Johnson asked if other counties have passed similar resolutions. Ms. Casarez replied yes, several to the South have passed a similar resolution. She added a Court Counselor was to be here this evening and did not make it, she had the list of the bordering counties that have passed it. Chairman Elmore said this is a state initiative. Ms. Casarez replied yes.

Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson made a motion to approve the Resolution Supporting Compression Increases for Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Detention and Youth Development Center Staff, as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bill Sexton and unanimously approved.

*WILKES COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
RESOLUTION SUPPORTING COMPRESSION INCREASES for
DIVISION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION
DETENTION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER STAFF*

***WHEREAS**, the Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention provides short term secure confinement in Juvenile Detention Centers and long term commitment services in the State's Youth Development Centers; and*

***WHEREAS**, the overarching mission of the Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the local Juvenile Crime Prevention Council to provide services and programming to ensure the protection of the community and rehabilitation of youth offenders; and*

***WHEREAS**, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention facilities are contending with an average 36% vacancy rate, largely due to impact of the pandemic which has driven salaries and wages higher across the board; and*

***WHEREAS**, Wilkes County juvenile justice staff are being expected to fill the vacancies in Juvenile Detention Centers and Youth Development Centers in addition to maintaining their caseloads and meeting the requirements of their positions without additional compensation; and*

***WHEREAS**, Compression Salary Increases for Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention facility staff were removed from the state's budget prior to final approval; and*

WHEREAS, similar salary adjustments or increases WERE approved for Department of Public Safety staff in adult facilities;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that Wilkes County Commissioners support the adequate and timely increase of the salaries of juvenile facility staff across the State of North Carolina to make those positions competitive and to ensure qualified staff are compensated adequately for years of experience for the purposes of retention, as well as lay the groundwork for recruitment of qualified staff for youth facilities which will ensure the immediate and ongoing protection of the community and strengthen rehabilitative services for those juveniles most in need.

Adopted this _____ day of _____, 2022.

Chairman, Wilkes County Board of Commissioners Clerk to the Board of County Commissioners

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING – THE HEALTH FOUNDATION, INC. – OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS – Chairman Elmore recognized Brooke Felts, Assistant County Attorney. Ms. Felts stated before the Board for consideration is a Memorandum of Understanding between the County and The Health Foundation. She added this will help to implement the Opioid Litigation Funds. Through the MOA approved by the County and State in 2021 they had to select Option A or B and structure a process to utilize the funds. Ms. Felts said Wilkes chose Option B and it required them to participate in a strategic collaborative planning process. The partner selected by the County is the COPE Committee, which is convened by The Health Foundation. She added the MOU outlines the roles and responsibilities of the partners in this process over the next 16-18 years. Ms. Felts stated The Health Foundation will screen applicants and make recommendations through the County’s Budget process annually. The Board will have the final approval of all funding decisions. The Health Foundation will also help the County to comply with the States reporting requirements, to include compiling data to provide in reports to the State. She added if approved and to line up with the County’s Budget schedule for 2023 a press release will be published tomorrow to request applications for funding. Ms. Felts stated Heather Murphy and Jenn Wages are in attendance to answer questions if needed as well.

Chairman Elmore asked if the MOU is approved does it prevent the Board from entering into other agreements over the years. Ms. Felts replied no, they can change the planning partner at anytime throughout the process. The MOU automatically terminates in 2040, but they can terminate sooner if the Board chooses to do so. Chairman Elmore said a yearly report is due on March 15, could this be a presentation to the Board rather than just a report. Ms. Murphy replied yes, they are happy to do this. Ms. Felts added March 15th is the due date for recommendations for funding for each fiscal year. If the Board wants a report at that time this can be added, they can add that a presentation is made to the Board on the funding which will be after the Budget Process, if that is preferred.

Chairman Elmore stated The Health Foundation is a great group and Wilkes is lucky to have them. Commissioner Settle added Wilkes is fortunate to have them. As they look around at other counties, and they talked about the program Surry has that is good, but they don't have what Wilkes has, it works for them. Vice Chairman Greene added Wilkes has a better one that works here. Commissioner Settle agreed it works for Wilkes and it is all good, every county is different. He added many counties may look the same, but they are governed in their own unique way.

Vice Chairman Stoney Greene made a motion to approve the Memorandum of Understanding between Wilkes County and The Health Foundation, Inc., as presented at tonight's meeting; and to authorize the County Manager to execute the MOU on behalf of Wilkes County. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

RECOGNITION OF OUTGOING COMMISSIONER – Chairman Elmore stated *“it has been fun, Commissioner Settle has a great sense of humor, insightful, smart, and I have worked with him for 10 years. This is the best way to get to know someone, is to work with them. Eddie and I have had a lot of positive things for Wilkes County and we have agreed on a lot. We have positive things we didn't agree on, but I am proud to say it has been a pleasure to get to know him. Before he was elected to the Board he would come by the car wash, where I worked, and would question me as I was already a Commissioner. He aspired to be on the Board and it was good when he became a Commissioner”*. Commissioner Settle replied *“I had questions about some things that I didn't understand when I got in”*. Chairman Elmore said *“it has been a pleasure and his lovely wife, Shelia, is here tonight, she is a very sweet person. I have a story to share that I shared part of before, and it was Kellyanne Conway. That trip just stands out to me, Eddie, myself, and a fellow Commissioner went to D.C., we got in late to our room. In my wisdom I had booked a historic place in Washington D.C. that I found on the internet and it looked great. It was the rattiest place, you could feel that it was not good”*. Commissioner Settle added *“you could smell it too”*. Chairman Elmore stated *“it was close to the White House. The other Commissioner would not even sit down and we left”*. Commissioner Settle said *“the tax payors of this county surely to the Lord will not expect us to stay at this place”*. Chairman Elmore added *“it was quite the experience, it was 8 O'clock at night and here we are booking another place. Eddie I appreciate it”*.

Commissioner Eddie Settle said he has just a few comments *“Shelia and I were riding down the road, we are in Raleigh now and leaving to go back down as soon as we are done. When I crossed the county line I thought I need to say a little something, it has been over 10-years. I ran in November 2012, our fund balance them was around \$10 - \$12 million it started going up in 2009-10. I had not really paid attention to it. I did know these guys were making serious cuts when I come in for that budget, it was serious business. It is not like it is today, it was in pretty bad shape, these guys were making a lot of cuts that had to be done in order to get them back in the place they needed to be. There was a tax increase in 2007-08 of 6¢, it was coming back around and I learned a lot. Basically, when I ran it was to help the outer-laying areas of the county. I hear from a lot of people in the outer-laying areas, past Purlear, Traphill, East Wilkes, Sommers, all the way around, Wilkes County is huge. As we were talking earlier, it is hard to service this county, it's a tough business. I wanted to be sure everyone in Wilkes got what they*

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should get from their tax dollars. That was a goal of mine, you get in here and find out it is harder to do than can be done. I have learned a lot from previous County Commissioners, Keith has been on here, maybe the longest of anyone that has ever served. When I was elected in 2012 I nominated Keith as Chairman the next year and Gary Blevins was Vice Chairman, and I sat where Casey is sitting. I have learned a lot from Keith and Gary Blevins, he was a good Commissioner. TD Carter was an old time Commissioner from down East and he would call me and I would call him. Tracy Walker served as a Commissioner and I leaned on these folks for a lot. They had sat in these seats, and I learned a lot from them and have learned a lot from the current Board. If you can't learn from somebody, its not a good day. We have always had the very best staff, this county has the best staff in the State of North Carolina, John Yates is the finest there is in the country. I don't want you to go across the mountain, but they sure talk about you a lot, and I told them to leave you alone. I was looking at the accomplishment's and I want to say as Keith and I was talking about going to D.C. When you have opportunities to go to these places you learn from other counties and Commissioners and other governments that will help you. I was on the State Board in Wilmington and sat with another Commissioner and asked what is the greatest thing you have ever done in this County for Economic Development. He told me it is easy, everyone that comes through here gets a free 2-year Community College degree from Cape Fear Community College. I text Jeff Cox that minute 'what do we have to do, what can we do.' He said its about \$ 9 million and we started to work, especially Dr. Cox and the WCC Board. They got that done, you need these people and they have a lot of insight that will help you. When they need to go, they need to go to these meetings and learn from other folks what works for them and what works for you. We have accomplished a lot with the EMS Substations, that's saving lives, thank you. EMS 1 is being built across the road, things you can be proud of. I am proud, especially in the last 2-years that we gave our employees decent raises, especially our Sheriff's Office. They have gotten a 13% increase over the last 2-years, 7% and 6%. I'm glad we were fortunate enough to be able to do that. We built a new jail, Sheriff's Office, Ag Center, remodeled the old Sheriff's Office for DSS, Board of Education we helped with Moravian Falls School remodel and we are helping with Mt. Pleasant now. Our Board has always had a great relationship with our Board of Education and our Sheriff's Office. When you go to some other places, they hate each other, it's a literal hate between county boards and sheriff's offices. I don't understand it, but our county works together, we don't always agree, but we get it worked out, either here or in that office over there. I Chaired the 2-years of Covid, now that was a challenge. I heard Barrack Obama say to Donald Trump I wouldn't wish that on anybody being President during Covid, and that's two guys that really don't like each other. It was a challenge, to John Yates' point we never, ever closed this County, this door never closed. We did everything we needed to do to keep people safe, but we kept it open and our folks worked all the way through it. I was proud of that. We accomplished a lot and I stress the we, it is we, its right here working with them. We have one of the more senior Attorneys in the State and I tell you we need him. He's got a lot and has helped us a lot, the new one beside him is one of the smartest in North Carolina. We never raised taxes, we did have one tax cut, that was a shocker, but we did cut taxes one time in 10 years. I was worried about it, but it worked out, we cut taxes and kept a healthy fund balance. We have done that and I am thankful for all these things we have accomplished. The Race Track is coming back and things in this County are looking good. I appreciate all that we have done, it's a team effort, and I am grateful to let people know I come from the Great State of Wilkes. This is the way I feel, I had one guy to tell me, you know that is

not a State. I said not to us, we are our own state, Welcome to the Great State of Wilkes. Thank you for the support I have had, I have enjoyed this, it has been a lot of work, but it is good. It is truly a lot of work these men work hard for all they do. Thank you". Chairman Elmore added "he is a good Christian family man". Mrs. Sheila Settle said "he sure is and he's going to be a grandfather, we are having twins".

Commissioner Johnson said *"when he first announced he was going to run for Senate, I was torn, he wanted me to support him and I will. I sure hate to see you leave the Commissioner Board and I still feel that way. I know he will do a great job in Raleigh, but I definitely hate to see him leave. When I first came on the Commissioner Board he was the Chairman and we were right in the middle of Covid. You and I got to serve on the Covid-19 Task Force, it was very interesting and we had many interesting discussions. I appreciate all the encouragement you give, phone calls, and enjoyed going to Raleigh with you. He can talk to anyone and I just followed him around everywhere he went. I appreciate the love you have for Wilkes County and you will do a great job. I wish you the best in your new position and on being a Grandpa".*

Vice Chairman Greene stated *"It has been a great three meetings". Commissioner Sexton said "I was looking forward to working with you, but oh well". Mr. Yates added "it has been a pleasure working for you. We appreciate your good leadership, it has been a lot of fun". Mr. Triplett said "he echoes that, it sure has been a privilege". Commissioner Settle replied "I honestly say I love every one of you and would do anything for you. We have all had ups and downs and things we didn't agree on and have always worked it out. That is what you do, that crowd in Raleigh can do the same thing if they will come together both sides and work for the best of the people, not the government".*

Chairman Elmore said at this time they would like to recognize Commissioner Settle with a plaque and thanked him for his more than 10 years of service. He served as Chairman four times and Vice Chairman three.

OLD BUSINESS – Chairman Elmore said they had a Litter Committee Meeting earlier today. The \$10 uncovered load fee began January 1st, they had 600 people come through the landfill today, out of the 600 only 40 were uncovered and they paid the \$10 fee. He added 39 of them were happy and he believes they understand they are trying to clean up the County, this is hopefully a step forward on that.

ADJOURN – Motion was made by Commissioner Eddie Settle, seconded by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 5:39 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk
Chairman

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Approved: January 17, 2023