

**MINUTES**  
**WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**February 18, 2020**

**YEAR IN REVIEW – ANNUAL REPORT TO THE PEOPLE** – Cooperative Extension Director John Cothren provided the Year in Review Annual Report to the People and Dinner to the Board of Commissioners and other invited guest at 5:00 P.M. at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center.

**PUBLIC CONCERNS – CAROL BRACEWELL – WATER QUALITY – UPDATE FROM 2016 & 2018** – Ms. Bracewell said she wants to give an update on Water Quality. She mentioned she has a lot of information, first is from NRCS by BJ Cook with Soil & Water and copies are available for sale at their office. Ms. Bracewell said there is a lot of bacteria in the streams, it is organic and going to happen, it is what will be done about it that matters. She stated there are State and Federal grants through the Clean Water Management Trust fund that they need to apply for. Farms can apply for up to 70% matching funds for conservations efforts. Ms. Bracewell mentioned some things these funds could be used for. She added she is good at what she does and it is all about water quality and getting the word out. Ms. Bracewell said there is bacteria from cattle and poultry in Wilkes and it happens organically, sedimentation ponds are needed and farmers need to apply for the 2017 Farm Bill funds. Wilkes county needs to apply for these funds, they need money and should apply for these programs. She thanked the Board for their time and stated she has lots of materials to share if anyone would like to meet with her and see it

The Board thanked Ms. Bracewell for attending and speaking.

**PUBLIC CONCERNS – SUSAN ROCHETTE** – Ms. Rochette thanked the Board and said her first concern is the plans from DOT on Hwy. 421-321-221. She added Mr. Wise has forwarded her the map and she will look at this and that was one of her first question. How the expansion is going to affect home owners in western Wilkes County. Her second question is about perpetuity of rights pertaining to shared wells and mentioned her specific issues and wants it to be known that she is asking these questions. Ms. Rochette asked if the county oversees Home Owners Associations (POA/HOAS). She has the covenants for the home she purchased, nothing in those governs what they have done to her and her property. She said she is here to raise her concerns and voice on this. Next she asked about securing miner rights on one's property and has been advised not to sever miner rights through the sale of her property. Ms. Rochette said she is asking this because she would like to know the status of what used to be an operational mica mine in the area of Buck Mountain. She said it was on a map, it is abandoned, as everyone should know mica is an important mineral element for the future and it freely blows around and she uses it for jewelry and things. Ms. Rochette said her final and most important concern is non-emergency telephone number for 911 this should be made available in the Wilkes Communications phone book. She added if someone calls 911 it may not be an emergency, it may be a question, but have no number to call for this. When she calls the doctor's office the message says if this is an emergency hang up and call 911, without speaking to a doctor she does

not know if it is an emergency. There should be a widely known, available, unpunishable option for someone that has to, by default, call 911 to ask questions. Ms. Rochette said this needs to be addressed. She thanked the Board for their time.

Thank Board thanked Ms. Rochette for attending and speaking.

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, February 18, 2020 at 6:23 P.M. at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center located 416 Executive Drive, Wilkesboro, NC 28697 with the following members present: Chairman Eddie Settle, Vice Chairman David Gambill, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner Gary D. Blevins, and Commissioner Brain S. Minton.

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

Chairman Eddie Settle welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting that had to be moved to the Ag Center due to early voting in the Commissioner's meeting room.

**INVOCATION** – Vice Chairman David Gambill led the Invocation.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** – Chairman Settle led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES** - Motion was made by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins, seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on February 4, 2020.

**BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS** – Motion was made by Vice Chairman David Gambill to approve Budget Amendment No. 25 (General – EMS – Wilkes County EMS has received \$250 from a Wilkes County Citizen, Franklin Wilson, to be used to purchase food for EMS staff. No county money involved) Mr. Huffman stated EMS had a service call to Mr. Wilson's address and this was his way of thanking them. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins and unanimously approved.

**FINANCE DEPARTMENT – CONTRACT TO AUDIT ACCOUNTS FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020** – Chairman Settle welcomed and recognized Finance Director Chris Huffman. Mr. Huffman stated he is here to request approval for the contract to audit accounts from Martin Starnes & Associates, CPAs, P.A. for fiscal year ending June 30, 2020. This is a standard contract used by all governmental entities in North Carolina for auditing services. The total contract amount is \$66,500 which is a \$1,800 increase over last year. Mr. Huffman said the reason for the increase is the State Auditor is requiring them to test more programs like Health Department, DSS, and the CDBG funds. He stated it is before the Board for approval.

Commissioner Blevins said this is typical of the state to give the county another unfunded madidate that cost them \$1800.00, that comes straight out of property tax to pay this increase.

He added they should be able to determine if they want or need to audit those departments and pay the additional fee. This is money they could use for other worthy causes in Wilkes County to help folks. He added they have to stop the state from doing this to the tax payers. Mr. Huffman stated this is in addition the audit the state already does for DSS. Chairman Settle agreed, this is an unfunded mandate that they can make them do.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to approve the Contract to Audit Accounts from Martin Starnes & Associates, CPAs, P.A. for fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton. Voting on the motion:

Ayes: Chairman Eddie Settle  
Vice Chairman David Gambill  
Commissioner Keith Elmore  
Commissioner Brian S. Minton

Nays: Commissioner Gary D. Blevins

**NEW BUSINESS** – Commissioner Blevins stated he would like to address the SAFE House for battered women and children closure, they have received several emails about this. He added they do not have all the information and numbers because they have no direct governing power over what happen. The Budget for SAFE House is approximately \$420,000 to \$450,000 annually which included many grants and gifts to a very worthy cause. Commissioner Blevins stated the county gave \$11,500 to SAFE House per year, which is a very small portion of their budget. He said there are some individuals that feel it is the Board of Commissioners fault. SAFE needed about \$200,000 just to continue their operations, they do not have the funds to give SAFE House to make up for whatever caused them to have to close.

Commissioner Blevins said this is a much needed service and they hope there is something that can be done in the future to open a facility in Wilkes County to help women and children that are suffering abuse for whatever reason. He added they could not make whole an organization that has mismanaged itself in such a manner. They need to hold accountable the Board and Director of SAFE and find out what happen. Commissioner Blevins said they did have a stake as taxpayers, they gave them \$11,500, the best they understand it was mismanaged. They lost their non-profit and failed to apply for grants they could have gotten. He added they challenge whoever was responsible to look into the matter and to find out what happen and hold themselves accountable. They need to let the people in this county know why that facility closed and was so poorly managed. Commissioner Blevins stated after that he is happy to try to construct a Board and come up with a staff to open a new facility to help those people that is vitally needed in this county.

Chairman Settle stated this Board is concerned for what has happen to SAFE House, but they do not know what happen. They think there may be another entity to come in and help or take the place of. He added there are two in Surry County, all the children have been taken care of through DSS. Mr. Yates replied the Health Foundation has stepped in and said they have

placement for all that was affected by the sudden closure. Chairman Settle said that is good and there should be more news to come on what happen.

**CLOSED SESSION** – Motion was made by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins to go into closed session under Section 143-318.11(a)(3) of the North Carolina General Statute and to consult with and give instructions to the Board’s attorney to protect the attorney-client privilege. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman David Gambill and unanimously approved.

Motion was made by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins, seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn back into regular session. No action was taken in the closed session.

**ADJOURN** - Motion was made by Commissioner Keith Elmore, seconded by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 7:21 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Eddie Settle, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: March 5, 2020