

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
March 1, 2022

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at 6:01 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson, Commissioner David Gambill and Commissioner Eddie Settle.

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 Casey Joe Johnson led the Invocation.

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

BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS – Motion was made by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson to approve Budget Amendment No. 25 (General – Health Programs – Wilkes Health received \$844 from the state. These funds will be used to provide nutrition services for WIC clients. No County money involved. Wilkes Health received \$124,848 from the State for COVID ARPA School Health Team Workforce. These funds will be used to provide mental health services pertaining to the COVID pandemic. No County money involved; and Budget Amendment No. 26 (General – EMS – NC moved to Medicaid Managed Care and awarded four statewide Prepaid Health Plans (PHP). All municipal agencies transitioned to an Intergovernmental Transfer (IGT) payment system and now are required to make an IGT payment for the state/local share. EMS will receive payments from the PHP on a quarterly basis with net reimbursement this quarter of \$20,000. Wilkes EMS partnered with Wake Forest Medical in a first of its type cardiac telehealth grant. Funds of \$31,900 received are used to compensate time, training, transports to Wilkes Health Department, and any additional equipment). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Eddie Settle and unanimously approved.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:

1. COMMUNITY CHILD PROTECTION TEAM ANNUAL REPORT 2021 – Chairman Elmore welcome and recognized John Blevins, DSS Director and Hal Wilson, Child Welfare Program Manager. Mr. Blevins stated Mr. Wilson runs this committee and will provide the annual report summary for the Board. Mr. Wilson thanked the Board and said the Community Child Protection Team (CCPT) is a group of community representatives. They are from different agencies who promote community wide approaches to solve the problem of child abuse, neglect, and dependency in Wilkes. He added CCPT organizations are in every county throughout the state. The one in Wilkes works very hard and consists of Law Enforcement, DA's Office, BROCC, Health Dept., School System, and several others. They identify and respond to gaps in child welfare through prevention and protection and are responsible for reviewing cases of abuse, neglect and dependency as well as review child fatality cases in Wilkes County. Mr. Wilson stated

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they develop strategies to engage community citizens and come up with recommendation throughout the year for this annual survey and also for the NC Division of Health and Human Service DSS. These surveys ultimately help to change policy and laws with legislation in the state to improve how child welfare operates throughout North Carolina. Mr. Wilson stated they are a big part of that and proud of what they do under the leadership of Mr. Blevins and have achieved a lot of success this year in the work they done. Vice Chairman Johnson asked if there are any events coming up that was listed in the CCPT report that they can participate in. Mr. Wilson replied they hope that will occur this year, it is being discussed, but no official decision made yet at this time.

Mr. Blevins stated the annual report talks about Ryan's Law which requires a disaster preparedness plan due by April. He added Mr. Wilson has already completed this which is subspecific to child welfare and sent to the state. Once they get this back it will come before this Board for approval, this is something new they are requiring from all counties. Mr. Blevins said one concern they have now is openings at DSS, they have had 12 Social Workers, 32% of their staff retire or resign since January 2021. They have 3 open social workers positions currently that have been posted a few times already, and are not receiving qualified applicants. Chairman Elmore asked if they are having post-employment interviews to find out why they are leaving. Mr. Blevins replied it job stress and is a struggle across the state. Mr. Wilson added pay plays a role and when people leave it adds an extra burden on the ones left to pick up their workload. Most of the applications are entry level and don't meet the state requirements so they do not get the maximum salary available. Commissioner Gambill added it sounds a lot like law enforcement and they deal with the same clients, so burnout is an issue and they feel like they are not getting much accomplished and feel ineffective at times. Mr. Yates said this is an issue across the board in all forms of government to include schools. He added Mr. Huffman has a whole new staff with the exception of one in finance and they will retire in August. This Board and the county personnel are the front lines to the people that are aggravated about COVID and it affects them and they all get the wrath of it. Commissioner Settle added they just came back from DC and met many Commissioners from across the county and one from a rural county in Wyoming and his problems were exactly the same as Wilkes. They can't get anyone to work and have openings too, it is country wide. Mr. Yates stated Wilkes County had 24 employees to leave in the last two months some retired and others resigned. Commissioner Settle added the pandemic has made this much worse and people realize there is more to life than working and if they have a chance to retire and move on they do it. Mr. Yates said unemployment last month was 3.2%, there are a lot of opportunities in Wilkes and the surrounding region and folks are looking.

Chairman Elmore said back 50 years ago people worked because they had to for food, housing, cars and the necessities. That is not the case now, it seems a lot of folks are making it without working and still have a cell phone, car and other things. Chairman Elmore stated they understand this issue and they will have to find out how to relieve the stress, make it welcoming so people want to come to work. They are not sure how to do that, but have to figure it out.

2. UPDATE – Mr. Blevins said he has one quick update which is the Medicaid audit that began about 3 years ago. They looked at 20 cases each month over 10 months for 200 cases audited and Wilkes DSS did the best in the state. That went through all 100 counties and now they are back to Wilkes again. This audit is very intense and risky, can be a money hunt. He added they want things accurate, but if there is an error it will be a county payback. Mr. Blevins added there staff is really good and they hope to be the best in the state again, but it is always concerning and a lot of extra work. They do keep a line item in the budget for this, just in case.

Mr. Blevins went over the monthly caseload reports for January. Next, Mr. Blevins went through the Foster Care financial report, Adoption Services financial report, Child Development and Subsidized Child Care financial reports for January. Vice Chairman Johnson asked if they have any children or staff at a hotel this month. Mr. Blevins replied not at this time. He added in their budget they are going to ask for 2 bathrooms with showers and a washer and dryer in the bottom floor (basement level) at the Curtis Bridge office where their training room is located. This will help when the staff has children they have taken in and need to stay with for an extended period of time until placement is located. It is a large open space and the rest of the area is almost complete and looks great. Chairman Elmore asked if they have seen anything from the state that will affect their budget that they need to know about. Mr. Blevins replied it will be similar to last year with one small increase, other than the unknowns with the Medicaid audit coming up, they should be close to the same.

Chairman Elmore and the Board thanked Mr. Blevins and Mr. Wilson for all the do at DSS for the citizens of Wilkes County.

RFQ COMMITTEE – WILKES COUNTY RURAL COMMUNITY WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE EXTENSION PROJECT – COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION – APPROVAL OF MINUTES – DISSOLVE COMMITTEE – County Manager John Yates stated the Committee held meetings for presentations and interviews and now are ready to make a recommendation. Their minutes and tally sheet are included in the packets and W.K. Dickson & Co., Inc. received the highest points with 472.5. Commissioner Settle asked if the meetings were all in person. Chairman Elmore replied yes, it included him, Vice Chairman Johnson, Mayor Marc Hauser, Manager Wilson Hooper from North Wilkesboro, and John Yates on the Committee. Mr. Yates added each firm presented and interviewed in person with a 10-15 minute presentation and then took questions. Chairman Elmore said they are happy to answer any questions. Vice Chairman Johnson added it was a good experience and they enjoyed working with the Town.

Mr. Triplett stated in summary the committee met, held interviews, then met a final time and the minutes from the last meeting are before this Board tonight for approval. He added there are three actions for the Board and can be handled as one motion which are: first to accept the committee recommendation if the Board wants to do this; second to approve the minutes from that last meeting of the committee; third to officially dissolve the committee since it has fulfilled its function. He has a motion he will read when the Board is ready. Chairman Elmore stated the Board does not have to select based on scoring, they can select anyone they want regardless of score. Mr. Triplett replied that is correct. Chairman Elmore replied they held two meetings for presentations and interviews and the third was to discuss the scoring.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to accept the recommendation of the Committee for the Wilkes County Rural Community Wastewater Infrastructure Extension project that W.K. Dickson & Co., Inc., be selected as the engineering and design professional for the project; that the County proceed with negotiations for a contract with W.K. Dickson & Co., Inc.; that the minutes for the February 21, 2022 meeting of the Committee be approved; and that the Committee be dissolved. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

SCHEDULE BUDGET RETREAT – Chairman Elmore asked if the Board would like to set a Budget Retreat for Tuesday, March 22, 2022. Mr. Yates stated dinner to begin at 4:30 PM with the meeting to immediately follow at 5:00 PM in the Commissioners Meeting Room.

Motion was made by Commissioner Eddie Settle to set a Budget Retreat to discuss preparations for the upcoming budget for Wilkes County on Tuesday, March 22, 2022 with Dinner at 4:30 PM, Budget Retreat to being at 5:00 PM in the Commissioners Meeting Room located at 110 North Street, Wilkesboro, N.C. The Motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and unanimous approved.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION – LEASE AGREEMENT – Chairman Elmore recognized Assistant County Attorney Brooke Felts. Ms. Felts thanked the Board and stated before the Board is a renewal of the leased office space at the Agricultural Building that the Department of Public Instruction has leased from the county for some time. She added the rent is unchanged, the term is 3-years, and will be back dated to October 31, 2021.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to approve the Lease Agreement with Wilkes County and the Department of Public Instruction as requested and presented at tonight’s meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS – Chairman Elmore stated they received a letter from Governor Roy Cooper. The County received the Grant that they applied for last year regarding for the bath houses and picnic shelter at Rivers Edge, in the amount of \$191,000. Commissioner Settle added they appreciate the grant for anything to improve Wilkes County. Chairman Elmore agreed. Mr. Yates said the contract will need to be on the next agenda for approval because it has a 45 day time limit.

NEW BUSINESS – Vice Chairman Johnson stated he attended Jamming at the Branch last weekend at the Traphill Library. They had a good time, 12 people attended, and that community is very excited to have this.

ADJOURN – Motion was made by Commissioner Eddie Settle, seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 6:39 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Giddeon Keith Elmore, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: March 15, 2022