

**MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET RETREAT WORK SESSION
March 22, 2022**

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, March 22, 2022 with Dinner beginning at 4:30 P.M., Budget Retreat Work Session began at 5:03 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson, Commissioner David Gambill, and Commissioner Eddie Settle. Commissioner Brian S. Minton was not available to attend due to a conflict.

Also present for the meeting were John Yates, County Manager; Brooke Felts, Assistant County Attorney; Bronda Cothren, Senior Financial Analyst; Tracy Triplett, Personnel; and Sarah D. Call, Clerk to the Board.

WELCOME – CALL MEETING TO ORDER – Chairman Keith Elmore called the Budget Retreat to order.

CURRENT BUDGET OVERVIEW – Mr. Yates presented the Financial Report through February 2022, the Fund Balance detail General Fund and the available Fund Balance as a percentage of expenditures for the General Fund as of June 30, 2021. Next he presented the statement of long term debt.

BUDGET PROCESS AND TIMELINE – County Manager John Yates provided the following timeline:

Non Profits and County Departments	March 18-25, 2022
Budget to Board of Commissioners	May 3, 2022
Commissioners hold Work Session	May 3 – June 7, 2022
Public Hearing on Proposed Budget	May 17 – June 7, 2022
Commissioners Adopt Budget	June 7, 2022

COLA – Mr. Yates discussed Employee retention. He went over the loss of employees for 2021 and year to date 2022 by Department vs. total employees and the current projection for annual inflation rate and social security cost of living increase expected this year. The Board discussed COLA's and the percentage they would like to see in the proposed budget at this time.

CAPITAL PROJECTS – John Yates presented a presentation on the following current Capital Projects: Emergency Service Center (EMS Base 1); Wilkes County Office Building; Burn Building; Wilkes Commercial Business Center; Wilkes County Rural Community Wastewater Infrastructure Extension Project; Wilkes County Airport T-Hangar Project; Wilkes County Airport Fire Booster & Tank Project; Wilkes County Airport Runway Extension; Wilkes County Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Extension Project; Wilkes County Recreations – Rivers

Edge Park Grant. Mr. Yates stated these projects total over \$72 million. He also mentioned future projects and staff has submitted a 95% Grant for the Airport Terminal.

ARPA REPORT/UPDATE – Brooke Felts presented an update on the American Rescue Plan Act: Grant Project Ordinance – Vaccine Incentive Program, Rural Community Wastewater Infrastructure Extension, Emergency Service Center/COVID Vaccination Center, Emergency Response Vehicles & Training Facility; and addition of Part F Grant with excess funds through an amendment needed to the Grant Project Ordinance.

LOOKING AHEAD – John Yates provided handouts and information on the below.

Schools K-12 Funding
Wilkes Community College Funding
Health Insurance

Mr. Yates went over funding to K-12 per child funding which has increase by 18% in the past 5-years enrollment has dropped by 13% in the same time frame. Wilkes County's current per child funding to K-12 is \$1,687.

Mr. Yates went over WCC funding from Wilkes County for current operating expenses on an FTE basis ranks 12th highest statewide in 20-21. Per student county funding of \$1,384 is 18% above the statewide county average. In addition, WCC received \$412 per student in county discretionary funding in 20-21, 62% above the statewide average and the 7th highest in the state for discretionary funding.

Mr. Yates stated the health insurance will increase 3% for FY 22-23 which is \$20 per month.

UNKNOWN – Mr. Yates stated there are many unknowns at this time which will affect the budget:

Economy – is very strong, Wilkes is 13th in the state for increase in sales tax, unemployment is low at 3%, there were 93 new residential building permits and 12 modular in the last year.

Uncertainties – large geographical county, fuel costs, rise in cost of all goods and services, recession.

Weaknesses – staff turnover could make the county vulnerable in critical areas, very dependent on sales tax, workforce, record inflation, lack of housing.

Strengths – good conservative Leadership that has built a strong fund balance and a Board of Commissioners that plans ahead instead of reacting has put Wilkes County in a strong fund balance position with very little debt.

Opportunities – Economic Development, Distribution Center, Speedway, Wilkes Commercial Business Center, retail and housing growth, many Capital Projects completed and more in process and planned, Airport growth.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION – The Board discussed they support COLA's for all employees and this will be a priority and do not support a tax increase. The Board discuss Solid Waste and changes to the Ordinance and Occupancy Tax.

ADJOURN – The Budget Retreat Work Session ended at 6:43 P. M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Gideon Keith Elmore, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: April 5, 2022