

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET WORK SESSION
May 10, 2022

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, May 10, 2022 at 4:40 P.M. at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center Meeting Room located at 416 Executive Drive, Wilkesboro, N.C. for a Budget Work Session. Present for the meeting were the following members: Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson, Commissioner David Gambill, Commissioner Eddie Settle, and Commissioner Brian S. Minton.

Also present for the meeting were John Yates, County Manager; Chris Huffman, Finance Director; Brooke Felts, Assistant County Attorney; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Keith Elmore welcomed everyone and called the work session to order.

INVOCATION – Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson led the Invocation.

FUNDING REQUEST NOT INCLUDED IN RECOMMENDED BUDGET – Mr. Yates stated there were 3 requests that were not included in the recommended Budget for discussion:

1. Thurmond Community Center, requested \$5,000. This was received after the deadline.

CONSENSUS – After a brief discussion the Commissioners agreed to approve an appropriation to Thurmond Community Center of \$1,720 the same amount given to the other Community Centers that made requests in the proposed 2022-2023 Wilkes County Budget.

2. Town of Wilkesboro Main Restroom and Concession Stand \$75,000 (1/2 of the cost estimated at \$150,000) located near Bridge Street at Cub Creek Park.

3. Catherine H. Barber Homeless Shelter (request \$100,000) recommended budget includes \$50,000 FY 22-23 and \$50,000 FY 23-24 in addition to the \$10,000 appropriation. After discussion the Commissioners asked Mr. Yates to obtain more information on the cost of the renovation, number of people they serve, etc. and the Board will discuss this at the next Budget Work Session.

FEE INCREASES REQUESTED:

1. Environmental Health – Angie Rhodes and Rachel Willard discussed in detail the proposed fee increases for Environmental Health and how they came up with the 25% increase requested.

2. Inspections Department

3. Landfill

CONSENSUS – After discussion Chairman Elmore, Vice Chairman Johnson, Commissioner Gambill, and Commissioner Minton agreed to the \$10.00 unsecured load fee as recommended in the proposed 2022-2023 Wilkes County Budget. Commissioner Eddie Settle was not in favor of the unsecured load fee as proposed.

4. Planning Department

5. Wilkes EMS

CONSENSUS – After further discussion the Commissioners were not in favor of any fee increases for Environmental Health; Inspections; Landfill (except unsecured load fee of \$10 as stated above); Planning; or Wilkes EMS as proposed in the 2022-2023 Wilkes County Budget.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION:

Commissioner Eddie Settle suggested an 8% COLA which is 2% more than proposed and asked how much this would cost. Mr. Yates replied 1% is approximately \$230,000, 2% is \$460,000. Commissioner Settle stated the cost of living is 8.5% and would like to at least give 7%. Commissioner Minton added he and Commissioner Gambill have fought for pay raises for county employees for 4 years. He is good with a 10% raise, Wilkes is still not in line with other counties and they are training them to go somewhere else. Chairman Elmore stated he agrees, but 6% is good. They pay the total cost of Insurance, which went up, so they are giving them more than 6%. Mr. Yates replied insurance went up 2%. Chairman Elmore asked what do they pay in retirement. Mr. Huffman replied they pay \$9,800 annually for insurance on each position. Chairman Elmore stated they need to stay in line with the private sector 8%-10% is excessive, it is not one time money, it is an ongoing expense. If a down turn comes this will be an issue. Commissioner Minton said this is what the surrounding counties are giving employees.

Commissioner Settle asked could they meet in the middle and go 7%. He added last year they did 3% for employees and 6% for the Sheriff's Department. Commissioner Gambill stated it cost \$230K and he is good with 7%. It's still a little low on starting Deputy pay, but will help Law Enforcement to be more competitive. Commissioner Minton said he is good at 8%, County Employees are worth it. Chairman Elmore added there is no question the employees are worth it, but can they afford it. Vice Chairman Johnson agreed there is no question the employees are worth it, there is a lot of good things going on and they are the ones to thank for it. He added at this time he is good with 6%, wish they could do more, but 6% is a good place to be. Chairman Elmore agreed and ask what they pay for employee retirement. Mr. Yates replied they contribute 10.21% for retirement, the employee puts in 6%. Mr. Huffman added Law Enforcement gets an additional supplement from the county.

Chairman Elmore stated when compared to other counties, they have to keep in mind. Years ago, the Board at that time reduced the hours of work to 37.5 instead of giving a raise. This makes Wilkes much more competitive when this is considered. He wanted to fix this a few years ago

and put everyone at 40 hours and pay them accordingly. Commissioner Minton said he would prefer 8%, but will agree to 7% along with Commissioner Settle and Commissioner Gambill in order to get the county employees as much as possible. He requested a study of the surrounding counties to see how underpaid the employees may be, until they see this they are not going to know.

CONSENSUS – After discussion Commissioner Gambill, Commissioner Settle, and Commissioner Minton agreed to an increase of 1% for a total of 7% COLA for all full time County Employees for the proposed 2022-2023 Wilkes County Budget. Chairman Elmore and Vice Chairman Johnson was in favor of 6% COLA as requested in the proposed budget.

Commissioner Settle said the Sheriff's Department got a new Deputy and received 6% last year and it was all deserved. It is their sole job to keep people in this county safe, EMS needs 4 new positions they requested, especially the crew chief. He added they also need a location in Boomer. There are 757 square miles and a big county to try to service with a 10 minute response time. Commissioner Settle added they need these positions. Chairman Elmore asked what this would cost including gear, vehicles, training, etc. Mr. Yates replied it would cost \$160,000 plus benefits for the 3 people and 1 crew chief. Commissioner Gambill asked if they received any new employees in the proposed budget. Mr. Yates replied no. Commissioner Gambill said last time they did this for EMS they set a goal and added a few each year until they got them where they needed to be. He added he would like a 5 year plan to reach a goal, they need to see where their numbers are and the call volume. They have built two substations and are in the process of building a new EMS. Commissioner Gambill added this is what they did before to get them off the 24 hours shifts and what a huge help that was. Mr. Yates said to add a substation to Boomer with a building, site work, equipment, supplies, uniforms, etc. and the 8 full time with benefits will cost almost \$1 million. Chairman Elmore added they are building EMS a \$12 million facility. Commissioner Minton stated he has been asking for this in Boomer since he came to the Board, the folks in Darby, Ferguson, and Boomer all deserve EMS services as well.

Chairman Elmore asked if Mr. Pennington is recommending a site in Boomer and what are the calls. Mr. Yates replied on average is about 1 call per day. Chairman Elmore agreed all need service and does not understand why they have to build a building to do this. It takes need an ambulance and 2 people to service an area. Mr. Yates said they can ask Tim Pennington to come to the next budget work session and provide information to the Board for this. Commissioner Gambill said they are happy to listen and would like to see a long term plan. He added they have improved EMS a lot in the past few years and they have many capital projects at this time and need to get some of them complete and then look at moving forward. Vice Chairman Johnson asked about housing EMS at Fire Departments. Mr. Yates replied they do this in Millers Creek and have in the past, sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

ADJOURN – The Budget Work Session of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners adjourned at 5:52 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Gideon Keith Elmore, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: June 7, 2022