

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
May 16, 2017

PUBLIC HEARING – 2017-2018 PROPOSED WILKES COUNTY BUDGET – Chairman Greg Minton declared the Public Hearing open concerning the 2017-2018 proposed Wilkes County Budget at 6:38 P.M. on Tuesday, May 16, 2017 with the following members present: Chairman Greg Minton, Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner David Gambill and Commissioner Eddie Settle.

Also present were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; Jerry Shepherd, Finance Director; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Public Notice for the Public Hearing was published in the Wilkes-Journal Patriot on May 5 and May 9, 2017, posted on the County bulletin board outside the meeting location and on the County website. The Public Notice is attached and made a part of these minutes.

Chairman Greg Minton recognized the following individual who addressed the Board:

BERT YOUNG – FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH NORTH WILKESBORO – Mr. Young thanked the Board for their service to the county and its citizens and for time to address the Board. He stated he is here to ask for financial support from Wilkes County for the Hospitality House of Boone. Next he briefly gave statistics of homeless folks in Wilkes and some of the services provided by the Hospitality House. Mr. Young stated they serve 7 counties and of these seven Yancey, Mitchell, and Alleghany only have 5% of their citizens to go to the facility. The other 4 which are Avery, Watauga, Ashe, and Wilkes have the most citizens served at the Hospitality House, he added. Mr. Young said of these four Wilkes is the only one that does not financially support them. He added Watauga and Ashe gives \$10K with Avery giving \$3K annually. In closing he said the cost for one person to follow the plan and stay one year at the Hospitality House is \$13K and he hopes Wilkes County would consider contributing this amount from the \$84 million budget.

MISTY SMITHEY – REGISTER OF DEEDS BUDGET – Mrs. Smithey thanked the Board for allowing her to speak. She introduced herself and stated she is here concerning the budget for her office. Mrs. Smithey stated she requested a 12% across the board raise for each Register of Deeds employee and asked for her request to please be considered. She added their office is self-funded, makes money for the county, has a net profit to the county and does not run from tax payers' dollars. Mrs. Smithey provided a brief history of the staffs' service, time, and recent training, as well as the improvements that have been made since she has become Register of Deeds. She said she asked for much needed raises that are long overdue and well deserved. She did not ask for a much needed employee to get back to the number they use to have. Mrs. Smithey stated no raises have been given or ask for other than cost of living raises. In closing she said they generate a revenue of \$600K per year, she was very conservative with the budget,

requested \$15K less than last year's budget, which included the raises since they no longer have the high salary of the former Register of Deeds, now is the time to implement the raises.

BARRY BUSH – REGISTER OF DEEDS PAY – Mr. Bush said he is here to support Misty Smithey's comments about the Register of Deeds office. He added the county is getting the work of 6 people for 5. It's nice they have kept the good, long term employees, and a seamless transition with Mrs. Smithey stepping into this office, he added. Mr. Bush said the staff at the Register of Deeds and all county employees do a great job and he has no complaints. In closing, he added he is not a tax payer in any of the three fire districts, but it amazes him in Wilkes if you have a car accident how quickly the emergency medical folks show up and he would give them anything he could. Mr. Bush thanked the Board and said they are doing a great job and he has no complaints.

Chairman Minton asked if anyone else would like to speak regarding the proposed 2017-2018 Wilkes County Budget. Hearing no comments on the proposed 2017-2018 Wilkes County Budget, Chairman Minton declared the Public Hearing closed at 6:47 P. M.

PUBLIC HEARING – REQUEST BY RURAL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT FOR FIRE TAX RATE INCREASES IN FISCAL YEAR 2017-2018 BUDGET – Chairman Greg Minton declared the Public Hearing open concerning the requests by Rural Volunteer Fire Departments for fire tax rate increases in fiscal year 2017-2018 Wilkes County Budget at 6:47 P.M. on Tuesday, May 16, 2017 with the following members present: Chairman Greg Minton, Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner David Gambill and Commissioner Eddie Settle.

Also present were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; Jerry Shepherd, Finance Director; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Public Notice for the Public Hearing was published in the Wilkes-Journal Patriot on May 5 and May 9, 2017, posted on the County bulletin board outside the meeting location and on the County website. The Public Notice is attached and made a part of these minutes.

Chairman Greg Minton recognized the following individual who addressed the Board:

ALLEN NICHOLS, CHIEF – BOOMER VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. – Mr. Nichols said he has a letter to read. He stated the Board of Directors of Boomer Fire Department are proposing a fire tax increase for the 2017-2018 budget year in the amount of 1¢ per \$100 evaluation. The proposed increase would raise the current fire tax from 10¢ back to 11¢ and increase the department's budget by around \$10K, he added. Mr. Nichols said the request is due to the continuing raising cost in today's economy, loss of income from property re-evaluations, need to provide adequate fire protection, and medical responder services. Until now they have been able to anticipate their income and manage expenses accordingly, he noted. He said in 1973 the tax rate was 15¢ and they were able to lower it to 10¢ over the years, however the rising cost in this profession and increased medical calls has placed a burden on them that only a tax rate increase can alleviate. Mr. Nichols said they do not take this decision

lightly, they are tax payers in this district, but the benefits far outweigh the cost. Next he briefly went over their income, expenses, purchases, improvements, and call volume for the past 7-8 years. In closing Mr. Nichols said the plan is to get the tax back down and to adjust as the evaluations adjust.

The Board thanked Mr. Nichols. Chairman Minton asked if anyone else would like to speak on behalf of the request from Boomer. Hearing no comments the Chairman recognized Broadway.

TRACY BROOKS, CHIEF – BROADWAY FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. – Mr. Brooks said Keith York, Treasurer is attending with him. He stated he has not spoken with Mr. Nichols in years but what he said is very similar to Broadway and he expects Mountain View is the same. Mr. Brooks added the expenses in fire service are continually rising, but the income is not. He stated Broadway is asking for a 4¢ per \$100 tax evaluation increase, from the current 5¢ to 9¢. As far as he is aware their rate has been 5¢ from the beginning. He joined in 1989 and that is what it was then, he added. Mr. Brooks said this brings in \$150K and expenses over the past 3-years has averaged almost the same amount, but in 2016 they lost \$12K their expenses exceeding their income due to purchase of equipment. He added they have divided the 4¢ increase into 4 areas: 1¢ for the operating fund of \$30K; 1¢ for a truck fund to replace aging vehicles over time; 2¢ for building repairs/remodel in the future. Mr. Brooks stated their call volume is also increasing. He noted they do not want to raise their taxes, but they have to in order to provide the services, get the trucks they need, and keep the building up. In closing he said they have some large expenses coming up in the next few years and are requesting a 4¢ increase now. Every 5 years they will look at the tax rate, if they had done this in the past they would not need the entire 4¢ they are asking for tonight. Mr. Brooks thanked the Board for their time.

The Board thanked Mr. Brooks. Chairman Minton asked if anyone else would like to speak on behalf of the request from Broadway. Hearing no comments the Chairman recognized Mountain View.

GARY WHITLEY, BOARD MEMEBER – MOUNTAIN VIEW VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. – Mr. Whitley said the Chairman of their Board, Bill Sexton, is recovering from back surgery and Dwight Byrd also had a conflict, so he was contacted last night and ask to come in their place. He thanked the Board for their time and stated they are in the same situation as most other fire departments. Their accountants, Benson & Blevins have ask them for the past 3-years to request a tax rate increase, which they have not done until now, he added. Mr. Whitley said they keep their spending to a minimum, but the cost of fire equipment is extremely high. They have State required expenditures and feel they need to increase their rate from 5¢ to 8¢ and are asking for a 3¢ increase, he noted. Mr. Whitley stated they saw this coming and last year cut their non-emergency spending as much as they could. He added the main pumper truck will have to be replaced in the next 4 years, it is 20 years old. He said by December 30th this year they have to replace 10 sets of turnout gear, at a cost of \$2K each for \$20K total, 10 air bottles for air packs at a cost of \$800 each for \$8K total, and only have \$64K on hand. Mr. Whitley said they need these funds to operate on. They have been fortunate, he was a fireman for 22 years and has been on the Board for about this same length of time and their rate has always been 5¢, he added. In closing Mr. Whitley said Mountain View

watches their spending closely, but they have large expenditures coming up and this is why they are asking for this increase.

The Board thanked Mr. Whitley. Chairman Minton asked if anyone else would like to speak on behalf of the request from Mountain View.

Fire Marshal, Kevin Bounds stated on behalf of the three fire departments that spoke he would like to add Boomer, Broadway, and Mountain View did not take the requests to raise their taxes lightly. He said he has met with all of these departments about the fire district maps and some of their lines changed a little, but inheritably across the county call volume is going up and medical calls and cost are going up. Mr. Bounds said new protocols just came out for first responders' for equipment and medical supplies and they will have to carry and provide this out of pocket. He stated trucks are also very expensive to purchase. Mr. Bounds said there are inspections coming up, state requirements, training requirements, and outfitting fire fighters in the required gear cost \$10K to \$12K. He added he is surprised more departments didn't ask for an increase and expects to see more requests next year. Mr. Bounds stated the cost to operate a fire department is going up, tax revenues are staying the same or declining, he supports these three department and the requests they made. He thanked the Board for allowing him time to speak.

Chairman Minton thanked Mr. Bounds and also thanked all the gentleman with the Fire Departments for their service to the citizens in this community. He said without them performing these essential functions it would be unfathomable the cost to this county. Chairman Minton added they provide a great service and he wants to personally thank one and all on behalf of the Board and his family, especially his Dad, whom they have assisted with on numerous occasions.

Chairman Minton declared the Public Hearing closed at 7:02 P.M. on the proposed fire tax rate increases for Boomer Fire Department, Broadway Fire Department, and Mountain View Fire Department.

PUBLIC CONCERNS – None

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, May 16, 2017 at 7:02 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Greg Minton, Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner David Gambill and Commissioner Eddie Settle.

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

Chairman Greg Minton welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION – Commissioner David Gambill led the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chairman Greg Minton led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion was made by Commissioner David Gambill, seconded by Commissioner Eddie Settle and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board meeting held on April 25, 2017.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion was made by Commissioner David Gambill, seconded by Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board meeting held on May 2, 2017.

RESOLUTION – APPROVING REOPENING OF FACILITIES AT DOUGHTON PARK ON THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY – Chairman Minton said this is a resolution to support and approve the reopening of facilities at Doughton Park. County Manager, John Yates said the Resolution was requested from the High County Council of Governments to support them and Alleghany County in their efforts to get the facility opened back up. Chairman Minton said this is located just outside of Wilkes County on the Parkway outside of Doughton Park. Mr. Yates added the necessary repairs are estimated to cost \$3.6 million. Vice Chairman Blevins stated it revolves around Bluff’s Lodge, the restaurant, and gift shop primarily. Commissioner Settle added it was a great place to eat and visit and they would like to see it re-opened. Chairman Minton said the largest issue they have may be the gas station. Vice Chairman Blevins added it is located in Alleghany but extremely close to the Wilkes line.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to approve the Resolution for the reopening of the facilities at Doughton Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway, as presented. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins and unanimously approved.

*RESOLUTION
APPROVING REOPENING OF FACILITIES AT DOUGHTON PARK
ON THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY*

WHEREAS, the Blue Ridge Parkway is the most visited unit in the National Park Service, attracting over 15 million visitors annually; and

WHEREAS, the economic impact on gateway communities from visitors to the Blue Ridge Parkway is over \$1.3 billion annually, supporting over 15,000 jobs; and

WHEREAS, the Blue Ridge Parkway contains 8 concession facilities along its 469 miles, intended to enhance and support visitor experience; and

WHEREAS, Doughton Park, located at milepost 241, is the largest recreation facility along the Blue Ridge Parkway, covering 7,000 acres and containing 30 miles of hiking trails; and

WHEREAS, Doughton Park honors Robert L. Doughton of Laurel Springs, who served in the US House of Representatives continuously from 1911 until 1953, and who was instrumental in the development and location of the Blue Ridge Parkway in northwestern North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, Doughton Park contains Bluffs Lodge, a restaurant, and gift shop which have been closed since 2010 and have fallen into disrepair; and

WHEREAS, necessary repairs to the facilities at Doughton Park are estimated to cost \$3,688,461; and

WHEREAS, availability of the concession facilities at Doughton Park are important for attracting visitors to the relatively-remote section of the Blue Ridge Parkway, located between the more popular Blue Ridge Music Center to the north and Moses Cone and Julian Price Parks to the south; and

WHEREAS, the reopening of Doughton Park concession facilities will have direct positive economic impact on the surrounding businesses, workforce, and Town and County governments.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners supports efforts of local governments and the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation to reopen the facilities at Doughton Park.

This the 16th day of May, 2017.

WILKES COUNTY:

By: _____
Gregory A. Minton, Chairman
Wilkes County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Sarah Call, Clerk

NEW RIVER SERVICE AUTHORITY – BOARD APPOINTMENT – Chairman Minton Recognized Tony Triplett, County Attorney. Mr. Triplett stated there are emails in the packets from the Watauga County Manager and some from him as well. He added there was one remaining lawsuit pending in the New River matter and it has now concluded. Mr. Triplett said the Boards needs to know the appeal period has not yet run out and it is possible there could be an appeal. He said it will become necessary at some point for the New River Service Authority (NRSA) Board to reconvene, which has not met in several years due to litigation making its way through the courts. Mr. Triplett stated that Board will need to reconvene and make some decisions in regards to records and other assets and winding up the affairs of New River. Since this Board has not meet in several years there are many vacancies in the 5 counties including Wilkes, he noted.

The Board was reconstituted in 2011 to consist of one County Commissioner from each of the 5 counties, former Commissioner Gary L. Blevins was the Wilkes member on that Board, he said.

Mr. Triplett stated since he is no longer a sitting County Commissioner in order for them to reconvene Wilkes needs a current County Commissioner appointed to that Board. He said the Commissioner that is appointed to the NRSA Board serves at the pleasure of the Board of Commissioners, there is no term, and it is up to this Board to decide who the appointment will be.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to appoint Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins to the New River Service Authority Board, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Eddie Settle and unanimously approved.

Commissioner Settle asked if the former member was sued in the law suit. Mr. Triplett replied yes. Vice Chairman Blevins said he expects this to be tidy up work only, he is not concerned, and does not foresee any issues. He added, he currently serves on the VAYA Heath Center Board and will be happy to accept this appointment.

OLD BUSINESS – SET BUDGET WORK SESSION – Chairman Greg Minton stated the Board needs a change of venue for the budget Work Session on the proposed 2017-2018 Wilkes County Budget set for Tuesday, May 23, 2017. It is currently set for the Commissioners Meeting Room and needs to be moved to the Agricultural Center, he added.

Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins made a motion to move the location for the Budget Work Session on the proposed 2017-2018 Wilkes County Budget on Tuesday, May 23, 2017 at 3:00 P.M. to be held in the Meeting Room at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center, located at 416 Executive Drive, Wilkesboro, NC. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Eddie Settle and unanimously approved.

The work session is open to the public.

ADJOURN - Motion was made by Commissioner Eddie Settle, seconded by Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 7:12 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Gregory A. Minton, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: