

April 19, 2017

At a budget workshop meeting of the Southampton County Board of Supervisors held in the Board Room of the Southampton County Office Center, 26022 Administration Center Drive, Courtland, Virginia on April 19, 2017 at 6:30 PM.

SUPERVISORS PRESENT

Dallas O. Jones, Chairman (Drewryville)
Ronald M. West, Vice Chairman (Berlin-Ivor)
Dr. Alan W. Edwards (Jerusalem)
Carl J. Faison (Boykins-Branchville)
R. Randolph Cook (Newsoms)
Barry T. Porter (Franklin)
S. Bruce Phillips (Capron)

SUPERVISORS ABSENT

OTHERS PRESENT

Michael W. Johnson, County Administrator (Clerk)
Lynette C. Lowe, Deputy Administrator/ Chief Financial Officer
Gloria P. Diggs, Office Clerk

OTHERS ABSENT

Julien W. Johnson, Jr. Public Utilities Director
Richard E. Railey, Jr., County Attorney

Chairman Jones called the budget workshop to order. After the Pledge of Allegiance, Supervisor West gave the invocation.

Chairman Jones states good evening to everybody. At this time, Mr. West do you have anything to add to the budget.

Supervisors West states the short version for me is I see a necessity and I see more of a greater sense. But, right now this will suffice and I think everybody can work with us. I wish there was more money available to us, but there isn't. And based upon what I've seen I'm ready to advertise tonight. I say let's put it in the paper and let's advertise it for Southampton High School so we won't have to take any back steps, because we don't have enough space.

Chairman Jones states alright, Mr. Cook.

Supervisor Cook states I've reviewed it, as we all have. They did a great job. I tried to pick at things, but it's just not there. There are no big ticket items we can really get any money from. I'm ready to advertise.

Chairman Jones states Mr. Phillips.

Supervisor Phillips states Mr. Chairman, I've done, probably as all of us have, tried to see if we...if there is any way to finance some more money to give back to the taxpayers of the county; let alone ...and in the conversations that I've had with Mike, I have learned more about this budget process than I have known for some time now. And, it's a learning process all the time. My hat goes off to both Mike and Lynette for the work they have done. We have to have more revenue coming into this county...everything; the price of everything is going up, and they have commitments. And, I had a really good explanation about our debt service here in the last thirty minutes before the meeting. I would say though that we are at a point where ... what we are budgeting this year is necessary and I would urge that we go ahead and advertise.

Chairman Jones states Dr. Edwards.

Supervisor Edwards states I think we're giving all that we have and a little bit more. The thing

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that nobody feels good about is the fact that... but, if you keep in mind that almost two cents of this is going to the schools, and the other penny is going to rescue squads and public safety. We have given it to the appropriate areas I believe; areas that absolutely needed it...so with that said I don't feel bad about it.

Chairman Jones states Mr. Porter.

Supervisor Porter states I have been over this and looked at it and it all fits together and pulled together, and did I find things? Yes. I found that we need more money. There are requirements that we aren't funding. We need to have 24/7 EMS Service (inaudible). We need additional funds for schools which we don't have. We have given them their minimum needs to basically tread water. And, we need revenue. That's the song I've been singing for a long time and unfortunately what was said four years ago appears to be coming true. That is if we don't get more businesses in here, and to complicate that we're going to see land-use go away. Then, we're going to see the tax rate go up \$1.50 within another six years. I said ten years four years ago. There is a big fact to that because we had a big bump with Enviva and you know that's going down. I think that we still have this attitude in the county that we don't want businesses. Well, do we want business? Do we want the alternative which is higher taxes? Do we want the tax rate to go to \$1.50? I mean, we have some people who are facing reality. We have people that are going to have to open their arms and we going to have to lobby to get some business friendly areas. And, that doesn't mean we have to give up our agricultural heritage or agricultural life, because there are businesses that fit together. What it means is we're going to have to be a little bit more accommodating to get some of these businesses in here. And, that attitude has to be made with the county. It has to be made with the Board. It has to be made with the Planning Commission. It has to be made with everyone, or we are going to be in trouble. And, maybe some of us won't have to worry about it, but, the people coming along today will and it is our job to make sure that they don't suffer. So, I don't have any problem. I think we have to go with this budget because it's the bare minimum. Nobody likes tax increases, but in reality we are going to be having tax increases. There's nothing we can do about tax increases. And, you're invited, because potentially there's going to be another tax increase. And, next year there's going to be another tax increase. And, you know, until we get out here and do the right thing there are going to be tax increases.

Chairman Jones states I feel the same way. I remember when we had this study done, and that has been fifteen years or more ago that our tax rates would be \$1.25 within a fifteen year period. And, now it has been almost twenty years and we haven't gotten to that point yet but now we are getting closer and closer to it. We just have to do like Barry said, and get friendlier with the people who are trying to come into the county, and let them come. We have to start taking whatever we can get. I don't mean any and everything, because we control it. We just have to let people realize that we want them to come. With that said, I agree with what Mike and his staff have done, and they have done a magnificent job as always. I've been over here when we were in terrible order, because we had so many mistakes. (Inaudible) So with that said

Supervisor West states we need a motion; we move forward, and we advertise.

Supervisor Edwards states I want to say one other thing. That is, in itself you know, our location, you know ...Suffolk is closer to the waterfront.

Chairman Jones states you say that, but Suffolk is running out of land.

Supervisor Edwards states you're up to Emporia, Henrico County, they're closer to the interstate. Those are two things that we lack. So, we are closed up in between, and the reality of it is, it's going to be harder to attract people here just because of... that's us.

Supervisor Porter states you mean we have to work harder.

Chairman Jones states we are just going to have faith. We are going to have to do a better job, or something, to try to get people here. But, at least we have more than what we had three years ago.

Supervisor Edwards states so, the bottom line is, how can we do a better job? I mean, we've got... we went to the Planning Commission and had all these new Industrial areas put on the map. What else can we do?

Supervisor Phillips states we're at a dead stand still right now, until this law suit is resolved, and we're not doing anything, we're treading water.

Chairman Jones states and every time you look around, there's something's needed.

Supervisor Phillips states what? And, we're missing a golden opportunity, right now.

Chairman Jones states look at the schools, they grew some. We've got to do a courthouse. And, next, right after the courthouse, they're going to say, well, you all have to have a jail. That's coming, too.

Supervisor Porter states the thing I want to say is, we've got to find a way to have an opportunity to make them work, okay. If I...the immediate reaction is not to find a solution when you have an opportunity. It is the fact that the opportunity offends some people. Consequently, we have a big group opposing an opportunity. That gives us a bad reputation which makes people not want to come. What we have to do is we have to mitigate the negative factors, like working with people who want the business opportunities to make them work. And, we haven't done a good job of doing that, okay. I spent my whole life working on solutions to impossible problems, and my approach is never been to take an absolute yes or no from the beginning, but to look at the pluses and minuses and try to come up with a way to mitigate the minuses so that we do have a win-win, if it's not a perfect solution. And, I think that we don't do a good job in this county of doing this. And, I don't think our Planning Commission does a good job of doing that.

Supervisor Edwards states the other complaint that I hear is from the businesses, from the people down on the by-pass, that, #1, you know there's a clamor now about reducing that speed, which I agree with, so, if we've got a business section down there, and there's a sign that's 60-70 mph, and it's actually a dangerous place to get out of, and we're not doing a whole lot to beautify the area. You know, there may be some signs; maybe some flowers on the medium strip there, or something. That would help these people. These people call me every week and complain about that, and I think they have a legitimate gripe. They got something going there, but I think we need to find some way more to showcase it.

Chairman Jones states Mr. Phillips, you got something...

Supervisor Phillips states I was just going to follow. I have people call me about the grass not being mowed along that strip.

Chairman Jones states in other words, we need to put a little more emphasis on just that little area right there.

Supervisor Phillips states that's our business corridor. And, it is sitting there without a whole lot of attention.

Supervisor Porter states I think we have a Catch-22. It's because that is VDOT's purview. It's not our purview, and we don't...we can't go out there and just do stuff, because it is theirs, okay. We can put pressure on them to do things. And, I agree it's a dangerous place because I have to come up there every day, and I come by the stop light... and I've almost been hit more than once, but again, we only can continue to get VDOT to run the studies. We don't have the resources, we don't have the power, and we don't have the authority to do any of that. And the things that are happening right now, they're going to do another speed study, okay. What good is that going to do, I don't know. But, what can we do? We have to work from the system.

Supervisor Edwards states we can help support the group now who's actively working that factor. There is a group, I understand going to Richmond, week after next, that has an appointment with the Secretary of Transportation, I've been told. I have two petitions on my front desk that people are signing about that. And, I think this board needs to come up with sort of support, maybe at the next Board meeting, bring it up, come up with some sort of support for this group to get this speed limit down to 45mph. And, get the grass cut better and do something to advertise the things we have going for us.

Supervisor Phillips states get them to implement what they said what was needed in the last traffic study, which were the, if nothing ... you know, I could ask multiple times about the flashing light.

Chairman Jones states the flashing light.

Supervisor Porter states I agree.

Supervisor Phillips states but we need to be a united... not just one of us. We all need to agree upon it.

Supervisor West states well, let me pour some water, cold water on your pot. Suffolk, when you get to the Bethlehem corner corridor on 58; 58 is so busy that there's an actual look at, and determination to go around, or into Old Nansemond, Suffolk towards the Isle of Wight sign and come out down below there enough so far, and avoiding all that business area, because of the reduction of speed and because it's so crowded and cramped. And, how would you like to think about VDOT getting serious with a by-pass around this? I promise you, you won't have any business, you won't have anybody coming in there buying any gas. They will just circle right on around and head to where? Emporia. And, VDOT is looking at 58, and we have to have a road that's reasonable, but we can throw all the water on the fire if we want to, and say slow down, slow down, they just might do what we want. And, I know lives are important, I know that. But, I'll tell everyone of you as an insurance adjuster, when your light turns green that does not mean you have permission to go until you have checked to see if something else is coming either way, okay. And, if the way is clear you pull out, you don't "jack it" on out there. So, and that's ...a lot of people don't abide by that.

Supervisor Edwards states the speed study that they did ...I think, I agree with Barry, it was a waste of time. The first one said that everybody average speed 85 percentile was 10.1 miles over the speed limit.

Supervisor Porter states but, that doesn't make any sense. We put patrols out there or police points and I don't think they wrote a single ticket. That means that they didn't clock anyone going over 10mph, and the average speed was 10.1 over, something doesn't ... put together. I mean it's what ...what, it's what...the numbers I heard, the average speed is 62MPH, and 62MPH, you cannot write a ticket, because the judge won't enforce it.

Supervisor Edwards states was it 55 or 60?

Supervisor Porter states that's in 55.

Supervisor Edwards states oh, alright.

Supervisor Porter states that's in 55, and the courts won't enforce it as being over the speed limit. So, you got a Catch 22 ...and we have ...VDOT cannot do anything that's not in the book. Look, you all deal with this, and we can't do anything that the General Assembly doesn't allow us to do. VDOT has to abide by the Assembly rules. They have policies, procedures and rules that they have to go through to change speed limits, and, that's why you have to go through these speed studies. They just can't arbitrarily change it. You can't vote in this group in here to change the speed limit. The General Assembly does not give us that power. We don't have that power, okay. And, what happens to these petitions each time they send them to the Department of Transportation Board, and you know what he does? He sends it back, he follows the law, he sends it back to Joe Lomax, and he says, Joe, do another study and tell me, can we legally lower the speed limit. That's what the law says he has to do. And, you know, no matter how much we scream and yell, until we get the General Assembly to change the law, that's what we have to do. And, Ronnie's right, one day there's going to be a by-pass by there, and we need to get ready for it. And, we need to lobby to make sure there's an exit there that people get on and off, and that we have enough businesses there to attract people getting on and off. Okay, we need to have...we need to have Hardee's have a big sign there. We need to have some of those other businesses have big signs. And not only would these signs... we would probably have to change some of our sign ordinances to authorize some of those signs. But, if we can sit here and think about the future, we need to plan for protecting those businesses when the by-pass comes through. And we have a different situation than Suffolk. VDOT doesn't maintain Suffolk's streets. Suffolk maintains their streets. So, they have more power over what they can do. People say, well Suffolk has a 45MPH speed limit. Well, Suffolk has a 45MPH speed limit, because Suffolk has more authority than we do because they have control over their streets because of their charter, and they don't get VDOT

to come in and do things. I guess they may subcontract VDOT sometimes to come in to do things, but, other than that.

Supervisor West states back to the budget. I know what we're doing is down the road, and this is a good discussion, and we are going to have some sort of a look ahead, get together workshop soon, okay. And, clamor/hammer on that then, and move back to this particular document tonight. And, again, I say, I think we seem in unanimous agreement, and everybody is ready to move forward, ready to advertise.

Chairman Jones states and we will discuss this at our retreat. Okay.

Supervisor Phillips states is there...do we have to make a motion to advertise?

Michael Johnson states to advertise...I think there was a motion. Was there a motion and a second Gloria? Did you capture that?

Supervisor West states we did, and he (pointing to Supervisor Edwards) actually seconded it.

Chairman Jones called for the vote.

The Board approved with a voice vote recorded as follows:

Dallas O. Jones	AYE
Ronald M. West	AYE
R. Randolph Cook	AYE
Carl J. Faison	AYE
Alan W. Edwards	AYE
S. Bruce Phillips	AYE
Barry T. Porter	AYE

The motion carried.

Chairman Jones states thank you gentlemen.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Dallas O. Jones, Chairman

Michael W. Johnson, Clerk

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