

**MINUTES FROM THE MONTHLY MEETING HELD BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS FOR THE COUNTY OF WARREN IN THE WARREN COUNTY ARMORY CIVIC CENTER, MEETING ROOM ON MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2023 AT 2:00 PM.**

**The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bertadean Baker. Other Commissioners present: Tare Davis, Victor Hunt, Jennifer Pierce, and Walter Powell. Others in attendance: County Manager Vincent Jones, Community and Economic Development Director Charla Duncan, and Finance Director Lee Faines.**

Chairman Bakers conducted a moment of silence and pledge to the flag.

County Manager Vincent Jones provided an overview of what to expect during the Budget Goals Setting Work Session. Mr. Jones asked Commissioners to write down their expectations for the FY24 Budget. Those expectations listed were:

- Chairman Baker – Each Department Head/personnel to identify specific needs for 2023 and how will these needs help our citizens, include budget amount and prioritize each.
- Vice-Chair Hunt – Focus on working toward the start and completion of the agriculture complex, focus on completing projects already identified and approved.
- Commissioner Davis – Focus on the positives and negatives of accomplishments we've had over the past years, identify new challenges we may face and how to plan to address them, decide how to model ourselves as a place where people want to live, work, and invest in, broadband, education, business, community engagement.
- Commissioner Powell – Methods to have more high school seniors working for the summer, ways to utilize Buck Springs more.
- Commissioner Pierce – Gain better understanding of what our financial obligations will be for the upcoming fiscal year and prioritize the list, understand how those added costs contribute to a better, efficient, and effective county government and Warren County as a whole.
- Commissioner Pierce later revised her priorities to – Fill critical needs positions, employee compensation, raise taxes as a last resort, support schools to a level that we are able to maintain on an ongoing basis, EMS Satellite Station 4.

North Carolina Health Insurance Pool (NCHIP) Warren County Performance Update:

Ellen Tucker, Wes Grigston, and Dave Costa of Gallagher discussed the benefits of being part of an insurance pool, as Warren County is. Ellen Tucker noted that it is her job to notify Warren County if they would be better leaving the pool, and at this time she says Warren County should not leave. Warren County could expect a cost increase of 5% to 6%.

IT Infrastructure Update – Glenn Hays of ATCOM Business Technology stated that Warren County currently has data hardware that is outdated and no longer covered by warranty. There are also software updates needed. Warren County is currently participating in security training through KnowB4 which periodically tests the security of our systems and also provides education for employees on ways to maintain the security of our emails and our systems.

Warren County Schools FY24 Operational and Capital Priorities – Superintendent Keith Sutton stated that in FY22 there were 1,688 students in the Warren County School System. Because funding follows the student, we saw \$1,032,201 in funding go to charter schools as more Warren County students leave our school system to attend charter schools.

Sutton stated that a majority of school funding comes from the state, followed by federal funding, and county funding is the least amount received. Three things expected to affect the FY24 Budget for Warren County Schools are inflation, raises for employees, and district and school improvements.

Commissioner Hunt asked if \$125,000 is the total cost of the SEMAA program – Sutton confirmed that \$125,000 is the program cost. Commissioner Hunt inquired about the number of students participating in SEMAA, however Sutton did not have that information available. Sutton stated that some students may earn credit for SEMAA participation, but SEMAA is not tied to graduation.

Commissioner Davis asked Mr. Sutton to provide information on the plans for construction. Sutton responded saying that they are working to consolidate elementary schools and two of the high schools. Consolidation will allow more kids to access programs currently available at other schools, and will cut down on the number of staff needed. Consolidation will also aid in modernization of facilities. It is expected that \$1.5 million will be needed for capital expenses as a result. Chairman Baker asked if school consolidation is a new trend and Sutton stated it is not exactly a new trend, but it is being seen more and more across the state. He further stated that the state is in favor of consolidation and is providing some funding.

Kerr Area Transportation Authority (KARTS) Update – Dr. Mary Young, Interim Executive Director of KARTS stated they are working to hire an Executive Director and Finance Director as both of those positions are currently vacant. At this time, the entire KARTS fleet needs to be replaced. A federal grant to support transportation authorities' stipulates that federal funds will cover 80% of costs, 10% is required from KARTS, and the remaining 10% is to be covered by all of the counties supported by KARTS. Warren County's share of that 10% match is \$70,192.

FY23 6-Month Financial Performance Update and Warren County FY24 Budget Schedule – Finance Director Lee Faines provided a handout with details about where the County stands at the beginning of the third quarter of FY23. At this point, 59.2% of budgeted revenues have been received and 43% of expenditures used. In the FY23 budget, \$2,843,272 in fund balance was appropriated to balance the budget. At this time an additional \$538,267 in fund balance has been appropriated, bringing the total fund balance available for use in FY23 \$3,381,539. Faines stated that based on excess revenues expected and unexpended expenditures to date, the County will not need to use any of the fund balance budgeted to offset expenditures.

#### Organizational Development Needs/Challenges –

- Sheriff John Branche stated there are items, such as a generator, at the jail that must be addressed. Sheriff Branche also noted a need for tablets for inmates to use to communicate with relatives. Sheriff Branche would like to look into having medically trained staff on-site so that inmates do not have to go out for medical treatment as often. During grant season, Sheriff Branche will apply for grants to purchase body cameras for law enforcement staff. There is also a need to replace handheld radios that are now obsolete. E-911 will need to replace equipment that is at the end of its life-cycle at a cost of \$405,000. The County will be responsible for \$288,000 and \$120,000 will be paid by the E-911 Board. Sheriff Branche noted that there are currently 23 sworn Sheriff's Deputies so he remains short staffed.
- Elections Director Debbie Formyduval reported that she lost a key staff member and now her office is working with two full-time employees and one part-time employee. Ms. Formyduval further stated that her office is in need of technology upgrades.
- Community and Economic Development Director Charla Duncan presented the Board with information regarding the recent purchase of the Lions Den and how to up-fit the space for the Farmers Market. Ms. Duncan has worked with Crystal Smith of Cooperative Extension and the Farmers Market committee to discuss options and set a budget. They will look into partnering with other groups such as GRRO.
- Employee Compensation, Retention, and Recruitment –
  - i. Health Director Dr. Margaret Brake stated that the Health Department is experiencing challenges in filling skilled nursing positions. There are currently 4 vacancies in the clinic, and no full-time home health nurses. There are 2 part-time contract home health nurses which has resulted in a reduction of services available. The Health Department has a total of 14 nurse positions and currently only 5 of those positions are filled. Dr. Brake has worked closely with Human Resources to try to fill vacant positions, however she believes that sign-on bonuses and retention bonuses may be needed in order to recruit qualified staff.
  - ii. Chris Pegram of EMS reported that, although the 24/72 Schedule was approved for EMS, they have not been able to move to the 4 shifts required for that schedule because they currently have 6 vacancies. Ideally they would like to hire 7 staff members, with at least 4 of those being paramedics, and raise the starting salary to \$22.15 per hour so that they can implement the 24/72 schedule.
  - iii. DSS Director Renae Alston noted that DSS is trying to promote from within their department to cover essential vacancies.

County Manager Vincent Jones wrapped up the Budget Goals Setting Work Session by asking Commissioners to look at the expectations they wrote down at the beginning of the meeting and to write down their expectations now that they have heard all of the reports. Priorities noted will be discussed at the upcoming Strategic Planning meeting scheduled for February 15, 2023.

With no further business, the Budget Goals Setting Work Session was adjourned.

Paula Pulley  
Clerk to the Board