

Surry County Board of Commissioners
Meeting of February 15, 2021

The Surry County Board of Commissioners met at 6:00 p.m., February 15, 2021. The meeting was held in the Board Room, Historic Courthouse, Dobson, N.C., virtually via Zoom and YouTube.

Board members present for the meeting were Chairman Mark Marion, Vice-Chairman Bill Goins, Commissioner Eddie Harris, Commissioner Van Tucker and Commissioner Larry Johnson.

Others present for the meeting, at various times, were:

Chris Knopf, County Manager
Sandy Snow, Assistant County Manager
Rhonda Nixon, Finance Officer
Ed Woltz, County Attorney
Jessica Montgomery, Public Works Director
Martha Brintle, MIS Director
David Speight, Interim Emergency Services Director
Nathan Walls, Assistant to the County Manager
Ron Niland, Mount Airy Mayor Pro Tem
Steve Yokeley, Mount Airy Commissioner
Dr. Myra Cox, Elkin City Schools Superintendent
John Altemueller, Elkin City Schools
Wayne Marshall, Hep Petra
News Media

News Media attended virtually.

Chairman Marion called the meeting to order. Commissioner Johnson delivered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Marion recognized Mount Airy Mayor Pro Tempore Ron Niland, Mount Airy Commissioner Steve Yokeley and Interim Emergency Services Director David Speight for attending.

Chairman Marion requested the Board review and approve the agenda. Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to approve the February 15, 2021 meeting agenda.

Chairman Marion requested the Board consider the minutes of the February 1, 2021 meeting as presented. Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes as written.

Chairman Marion requested the Board consider the consent agenda. He asked County Manager Chris Knopf for additional information on Medical Examiner certifications for current EMS supervisors William Crigger, Kevin Key and Eric Southern. Upon motion of Chairman Marion, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as follows:

Requests from the County Manager:

- Approve the following from the Tax Department:
 1. Total releases for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$1,572.21.
 2. Total refunds for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$2,365.05.
 3. Total NCVTS tag and tax refunds for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$975.11.

4. Total real and personal property discoveries for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$11,658.08.
5. Total motor vehicle discoveries for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$53.18.
6. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC additions for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$86,433.38.
7. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC refunds for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$60.09.
8. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC releases for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$0.
9. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC collections for the month ending 1/31/2021 in the amount of \$17,636.63.

Requests from the Assistant County Manager:

- Approve workers comp claims and settlement activity, totaling \$76,760.03, for quarter ending 12/31/2020.
- Approve for current EMS supervisors William Crigger, Kevin Key and Eric Southern to serve alongside Dale Harold as medical examiners once certification is completed.

Chairman Marion declared the meeting to be an open forum and invited members of the audience to address the Board on any matters of civic concern. He said he will ask speakers to be more concise going forward.

J.T. Henson requested the following items be addressed at the Board Retreat on February 24: Expediting the new jail project, adopting a public nuisance ordinance, identifying solutions for Surry County's litter problem and a time limit for open forum at Board meetings.

There being no further comments, Chairman Marion closed the open forum.

Wayne Marshall of Hep Petra provided a landfill methane gas project update.

Mr. Marshall said the project started in 2011 at the Surry County Landfill and discussed other details. He said Hep Petra has a great relationship with County staff and would like to refinance the project and get a contract extension. Mr. Marshall said Hep Petra would also like to increase the amount of methane gas collection and organize "Day at the Landfill" events for school children.

Mr. Marshall discussed with the Board how the project powers 500 homes, with the power going into the Duke Energy grid, and the project's popularity in other counties and cities.

Dr. Myra Cox and John Altemueller of Elkin City Schools presented the Elkin City Schools Facility Needs Survey, which is required by N.C. General Statutes.

Mr. Altemueller provided highlights of the survey, saying that the State's survey formula is not setup for schools that must share cafeterias and other facilities. He said that everything in Bill Powell's survey (LT Consulting) was included in the State's survey, which is collected by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Mr. Altemueller discussed future building needs for Elkin City Schools campuses. A stairlift at one campus and a lower cost solution for a tank were topics of conversation.

Mr. Altemueller encouraged the Chairman to sign the Elkin City Schools Facility Needs Survey document, which does not commit the Board to funding.

County Manager Chris Knopf presented a request from Surry County Schools to transfer \$108,000 in construction savings from the Dobson Elementary School project to the construction budget at Mountain Park Elementary School to cover safety enhancements for an enclosed corridor from the cafeteria to the main academic building.

Upon motion of Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to approve Surry County Schools' request to transfer \$108,000 in construction savings from the Dobson Elementary School project to the construction budget at Mountain Park Elementary School to cover safety enhancements for an enclosed corridor from the cafeteria to the main academic building.

Nathan Walls, Assistant to the County Manager, requested the Board vote on the reappointment of Gina Starbuck to the Surry Aging Planning Committee.

Upon motion of Chairman Marion, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to reappoint Gina Starbuck to the Surry Aging Planning Committee.

Mr. Knopf requested that the Board extend Miller Ambulance Service's contract for convalescent transports for two months to allow staff time to provide due diligence and report back to the Board on Miller Ambulance Service's performance.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to extend Miller Ambulance Service's contract for convalescent transports for two months to allow staff time to provide due diligence and report back to the Board on Miller Ambulance Service's performance.

Mr. Knopf requested that the Board approve previously approved closed session minutes for release.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve previously approved closed session minutes for release, which include the following:

- September 15, 2008, Item #2
- June 5, 2017, Item #3
- June 19, 2017, Item #4
- October 16, 2017, Item #3
- November 4, 2019, Item #4
- November 4, 2019, Item #7
- June 4, 2018, Item #4
- August 20, 2018, Item #2
- September 17, 2018, Item #1
- November 19, 2018, Item #1
- November 19, 2018, Item #4
- January 7, 2019, Item #2
- February 22, 2019, Item #3
- February 22, 2019, Item #4
- April 1, 2019, Item #4
- April 15, 2019, Item #3
- April 15, 2019, Item #8
- May 6, 2019, Item #7
- May 20, 2019, Item #3
- June 3, 2019, Item #4
- June 3, 2019, Item #5
- June 17, 2019, Item #4
- August 19, 2019, Item #1
- August 19, 2019, Item #4
- September 3, 2019, Item #3
- September 16, 2019, Item #1
- September 16, 2019, Item #4
- September 16, 2019, Item #7
- October 7, 2019, Item #1
- November 4, 2019, Item #2
- November 4, 2019, Item #3
- November 4, 2019, Item #4
- November 4, 2019, Item #7
- January 6, 2020, Item #2
- January 6, 2020, Item #4
- January 21, 2020, Item #1
- January 21, 2020, Item #2
- January 21, 2020, Item #3
- January 21, 2020, Item #5
- January 21, 2020, Item #6
- February 3, 2020, Item #1
- February 3, 2020, Item #2
- February 3, 2020, Item #3
- February 3, 2020, Item #4
- February 3, 2020, Item #5
- May 14, 2020, Item #1
- May 14, 2020, Item #2
- May 14, 2020, Item #3
- May 14, 2020, Item #4
- May 14, 2020, Item #5
- May 14, 2020, Item #9
- May 14, 2020, Item #10
- May 14, 2020, Item #11
- May 14, 2020, Item #12
- May 14, 2020, Item #13
- June 9, 2020, Item #2
- June 9, 2020, Item #3
- July 20, 2020, Item #4
- August 17, 2020, Item #1
- August 17, 2020, Item #3
- August 17, 2020, Item #6
- August 17, 2020, Item #8

The Board took a five-minute recess.

The Board came out of recess and resumed regular business.

In General County Business, Commissioner Johnson requested that the Board invite elected officials from Surry County's municipalities to eat lunch with the Board at the February 24 Board Retreat. After discussion with County Attorney Ed Woltz and Commissioner Harris, Chairman Marion said he would send invites to a minority number of Surry County's municipal elected officials.

Commissioner Tucker discussed an idea to help combat litter problems in the county, saying that Rockingham County uses inmates to collect trash, which also helps the inmates reduce their sentences. He read from N.C. General Statute 162-58, which states that county commissioners have authority to direct sheriffs to work inmates. Chairman Marion asked Commissioner Tucker and Commissioner Harris to work with the Sheriff on the program. The Adopt-A-Highway program was also discussed.

Commissioner Harris read the following resolution that addressed an attack on free speech by various social media websites:

SURRY COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BOARD RESOLUTION

CONDEMNING THE MAJOR TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES, AMAZON, TWITTER, FACEBOOK, APPLE, GOOGLE, SNAPCHAT AND YOUTUBE, FOR THEIR ATTACK ON THE FREE SPEECH RIGHTS OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC.

WHEREAS, Free speech and diversity of opinion is critical to the strength, health and endurance of our American political system; and

WHEREAS, The American public has become dependent on the Internet and social media for news, political commentary and sharing of their views. Without unimpeded and open access to multiple social media vehicles and access to thought leaders and news reports, the public is effectively being kept in the dark and force-fed only the opinions found acceptable by a select group of technology companies, which appear to have a single monolithic political philosophy; and

WHEREAS, The apparent collusion and coordination of the major technology companies to censor competitors and private individuals under the thin veil of making the Internet "safe" from political opinions with which these companies do not align is an anathema to our democracy and to the proper functioning of our representative form of government; and

WHEREAS, These technology companies are hypocritically indulging in the wanton use of double standards as they claim to be protecting the public from false and dangerous speech, while at the same time allowing hateful and violent rhetoric and threats from preferred actors to populate their sites. Big Tech caters to the demands of the proponents of a far leftwing political philosophy to the detriment of all others and more importantly to the proper functioning of our society. They cannot be allowed to continue to stifle the free exchange of ideas online by imposing narrow opinion corridors curated by the most shrill voices of the woke outrage mob, leaving the modern Internet a vacuous monoculture echo chamber, tailored to wooden pantomime rehearsals of establishment-enforced talking points, but little genuine debate and discussion, and the content of public versus private speech diverging ever more widely; and

WHEREAS, One of our Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, stated, "Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech." That truth was strengthened by the words of Abraham Lincoln who noted, "Free speech is our wonderful cultural inheritance as free people. A rare and precious thing in a world of government brutality and oppression;" and

WHEREAS, Totalitarian governments use censorship of political and dissenting opinions to control the dialogue and their citizens. This current attack on free speech, of suspending the accounts of thought leaders, shadow banning accounts and maligning opposing views with "false" labels is a disturbing and frightening embrace of those authoritarian tactics; and

WHEREAS, Additionally, the sudden and unwarranted de-platforming of a new competitor by the big technology companies violates their responsibility to the public. By silencing a competitor, they have maliciously flexed their monopoly power to not only kill off a competing social media platform, but to also rob the public of a popular alternative choice on which to participate in opinion sharing and dissemination; and

WHEREAS, The apparent alignment of these monopolistic technology companies with the Democrat political party creates an unhealthy and dangerous atmosphere that has the capacity to seriously and irreparably damage our republic. Knowledge, a full embrace of information and data, investigation of competing viewpoints and robust discussion and debate make our country stronger. Censorship makes it weaker and threatens the proper functioning of our representative government, our economy and our futures; and

Free speech is more than a "nice" idea, it is a foundational principle. It is vital to the proper functioning of a healthy and enduring democracy. Censorship that silences or discredits all views that diverge from those deemed acceptable to a handful of large technology companies is dangerous to our American system of self-governance; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, That this Surry County Board of Commissioners of the State of North Carolina hereby condemns the recent attacks of these technology companies on our right to free speech and calls on them to immediately reverse their malign action and instead promote free, open and robust sharing of political opinions and opposing viewpoints; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Clerk to the Board be and hereby is authorized and directed to transmit duly certified copies of this resolution to Mr. Sundai Pichai, Chief Executive Officer of Google, Mr. Jeff Bezos, Chief Executive Officer and President of Amazon, Ms. Susan Wojcicki, Chief Executive Officer of YouTube, Mr. Mark Zuckerberg, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Facebook, Mr. Tim Cook, Chief Executive Officer of Apple, Mr. Evan Spiegel, Chief Executive Officer of Snapchat, and Mr. Jack Dorsey, Chief Executive Officer of Twitter, as well as Governor Roy Cooper, members of the Council of State of North Carolina, Senator Richard Burr, Senator Thom Tillis, North Carolina members of Congress, Surry County Board of Education, Elkin City Schools Board of Education, Mount Airy City Schools Board of Education, Surry Community College Board of Trustees, all members of the North Carolina General Assembly and all 100 County Boards of Commissioners.

Adopted this 15th day of February 2021.

Upon motion of Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to adopt the resolution that addressed an attack on free speech by various social media websites.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to go into closed session.

The Board came out of closed session and resumed regular business.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to approve Management's recommendation for Emergency Services interim staffing.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to delete position #420602 and create a Purchasing Agent position, and to reclassify Purchasing Agent from Grade 65 to grade 70, effective 2/1/2021.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to reclassify position #412403 from a Budget Analyst to an Emergency Management Analyst, Grade 66, and add to the Classification Plan.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Chairman Marion, the Board voted unanimously to reclassify position #742003 from a Landfill Coordinator to a Public Works Equipment Supervisor (Grade 65) and add to the Classification Plan, effective 2/1/2021.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to create a Landfill Supervisor position and add to the Classification Plan at grade 64, and delete an Equipment Operator position once the vacancy occurs.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to reclassify vacant position #742016 from a Truck Driver I (50%), grade 63, to a Public Works Trainee (full-time), grade 60, and add to the Classification Plan.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:56 p.m.

Nathan Walls
Clerk to the Board