

**CASWELL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**Work Session**

**February 3, 2025**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**OTHERS PRESENT**

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Tim Yarbrough, Chair  
Frank Rose, Vice Chair  
Ethel Glynn  
Greg Ingram  
Tony Smith  
David Wrenn

Renee Paschal, County Manager  
Melissa Williamson, Deputy County Mgr.  
Russell Johnston, County Attorney

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The Board of Commissioners for the County of Caswell, North Carolina met in a Work Session meeting scheduled on Monday, February 3, 2025 at 5:00 pm at the Gunn Memorial Public Library, 161 E. Main Street, Yanceyville NC.

**Welcome:**

Chairman Yarbrough called the meeting to order. All were invited to pause for a moment of Silent Prayer and to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Public Comments:**

Vernon Massengill, Chair 911 Board, commended individuals, dedicated employees, and community partners who were instrumental in managing the 911 issues that the County faced. He also spoke as Fire Marshal to highlight the number of fire incidents that the County had to assist with recently. He asked that employees who serve as volunteer fire personnel be allowed to serve the County when needed to keep the County safe.

Jim Oakley, volunteer fireman, reiterated Mr. Massengill’s comments and spoke on employee retention. He expressed concern about the number of employees who were eligible for retirement at this time.

**Recognitions:**

Vice Chair Rose and Commissioner Wrenn thanked Commissioner Glynn for her service on the Board.

Commissioner Smith thanked Dr. Pamela Senegal, President of Piedmont Community College for her leadership and vision as she prepares to leave the College.

Chairman Yarbrough recognized two USDA employees, Jill Rudisill who retired from Farm Service Agency and Beth Smithey. Both individuals were thanked for all their help to farmers in Caswell County and will be missed.

## **Agenda:**

Commissioner Wrenn requested to add two items to the agenda:

- A proposed amendment to the Personnel Policy
- Discuss Open Meetings

There were no objections. Chairman Yarbrough added the items as #13 and #14.

A motion was made by Commissioner Wrenn and seconded by Commissioner Ingram to approve the Work Session agenda with the additions. The motion carried unanimously.

## **Presentations:**

### Outdoor Storage Violations

Manager Paschal introduced the item. She stated that the UDO allowed the Planning Director to assess fines on property owners that violate the ordinances. Staff has received several complaints about junk cars and the failure to comply with the outdoor storage ordinance.

Jason Watlington, Planning Director, discussed a strategy to move forward and deal with the issues. He stated that the County had not been able to enforce the ordinance because of the inability to collect fines that were in violation. Mr. Watlington referenced G.S. 160A-175 Enforcement of Ordinances. He outlined three areas including assessing civil penalties, court action, and injunction. The most common violation is junk cars which are received from complaints.

The current procedure for addressing complaints includes performing a site visit and a discussion may occur if someone is at the site. A certified letter is mailed explaining the violation. The letter describes the violation, the corrective action needed, and the action to be taken by the County within 30 days (civil fines) if the compliance is not met. The appeal process is also included in the letter. Letters have been sent out previously, but no fines were collected or compliance met. He clarified the civil fine process for the Board. He added that he received complaints daily.

After 30 days of receipt of the letter, a site visit will be performed. If substantial progress has been made, an additional 15 days will be granted, and fines will begin on day 46. If the site is compliant, a letter will be mailed. If the site is not compliant, a letter will be mailed with the civil penalties: day 31 - \$50; day 32 - \$100; day 33 - \$200; day 34 - \$300; days 35-60 - \$300 daily. After 60 days, the violation becomes a nuisance.

Mr. Watlington offered options – fines waived after 60 days. He also asked them to consider tenants—many of the violations are caused by tenants. The fines will be assessed against the tenant. A chronic violator can have a lien put of their property and incur other legal costs.

Commissioner Wrenn asked what would force the violator to take any action if it was considered a nuisance. Mr. Watlington explained the nuisance ordinance can be used

for one vehicle or many vehicles on public or private property and declared to be safety hazard. He noted that the violator has to be informed that the vehicle will be removed. Commissioner Wrenn asked if the County could sell the seized vehicles. Mr. Watlington responded that the vehicle would go to the tow truck operator and held there for 30 days. Commissioner Wrenn felt the landlord should be notified of every step in the process.

Commissioner Smith questioned options for enforcing the ordinance. He spoke about the landlord being caught in the middle. The landlord should be informed of every step and help the County collect the money, but the tenant should be held responsible. He asked if wages could be attached for tenants.

Vice Chair Rose asked for clarification on the 30-day process. Mr. Watlington explained that the Board or the Planning Director can ask that the County Attorney file civil action and serve the owner of the property. A hearing will be held before a magistrate. The County will obtain a judgement but if the resident does not own the property, there is nothing to attach. He added that his research does not allow the County to sell property. He opined that the best way to handle the situation would be to use the nuisance ordinance to allow the tow truck operator to remove the vehicle. The Sheriff would need to be present and have some type of agreement in place.

Commissioner Wrenn offered that vehicles were taxable. He felt that vehicles should be taxed if they were found in violation. Mr. Watlington asked if that would include the outdoor storage facilities that purchased the vehicles. There is a 25-vehicle exemption for repair facilities.

Chairman Yarbrough asked if there would be a trip made on day 45 if there was progress after the 30-day visit. Mr. Watlington stated that he would use discretion to determine progress up to 60 days.

Commissioner Ingram asked after 60 days started the nuisance status. Mr. Watlington responded that after 60 days if we move to that point, then day 61 would begin with fines. Day 90 would move to the nuisance status. He added that there is nothing in the UDO that sets how many days the County needs to wait. The Board would have to grant him authority.

Manager Paschal stated that this item does not require an ordinance amendment. Mr. Watlington stated that the Board can manipulate dates for anything past the 30 days. A question was posed as to whether a payment plan with interest could be implemented on the violator. Mr. Watlington reiterated that he would like to clean up the County rather than implement fines.

Manager Paschal asked for direction on how the staff should proceed. The Board concurred with the fine schedule. County Planning will make the determination on dates. On tenant vs landlord, Mr. Watlington won't fine the tenant but there is leverage on the

landlord. The landlord will be advised of what is happening in hopes that the landlord is supportive of cleaning up the County.

#### Presentation from NCHIP on Health Insurance Renewal

Manager Paschal introduced Dave Costa who discussed the item. The County has been a member of the North Carolina Health Insurance Pool (NCHIP) since 2018. Staff has been notified that the rates will increase 6 percent in FY2026 due to large claims that exceeded reserves in FY23 and FY24. A decision has to be made regarding continuing with the pool by the end of February. The item will be on February 17<sup>th</sup> for Board action.

Mr. Costa shared a PowerPoint presentation explaining the history of the pool. There are 10,200 employees covered under the policy. There are one year membership terms, and all counties and cities with 51+ employees are eligible for membership. New members are admitted by recommendation of the Board of Trustees. Mr. Costa stated the core pillars included stability, autonomy, service and community. Every group selects plans to meet their needs. The average increase for insurance premium increases outside the pool are 7.8 percent. The largest increase for the pool has remained at 6 percent.

He recapped Caswell County's decision to join after receiving a 30 percent increase from Blue Cross in 2019. The pool offered a much lower rate. He indicated that there was no reserve at this time for unforeseen risks. The average rate increase has been 2.4 percent. In year one, Caswell had a \$353k reserve. The optimal reserve would be \$200-250k. Part of the reason for asking for an increase is to pay for claims incurred and have extra surplus. The loss ratio for the past two years was 119 percent. The additional cost would be \$142,000 a year.

Manager Paschal noted that it was not necessary to decide whether the employees or the county would incur the additional cost but whether not the County will continue to participate in the pool.

There were seven years of savings to the County by being a participant in the pool.

Mr. Costa clarified that there was no danger of Caswell County being terminated from the pool. He discussed programs to better manage risks. He highlighted current programs that are in the pool. He discussed future programs. Programs include weight management before paying for the high-cost drugs. Weight loss drugs are a prime factor in increased rates. There will be a virtual Primary 360 option.

In terms of other benefits, the dental plan and vision plan will not be up for renewal. Open enrollment takes place in May. One of the largest benefits of the pool is knowing the renewal occurs in December/January.

Manager Paschal highlighted that should the County leave the pool, it will be responsible for any unpaid claims. If the County left for a year, a new plan would be underwritten which may be more expensive or the County might not be considered.

Mr. Costa indicated that at the end of March, he would need to know the plan design and rates in order for open enrollment in May.

Manager Paschal asked Mr. Costa to discuss the accuracy of information vs. manual reporting. Mr. Costa stated that the reporting system is updated each week and sends files to other vendors. It's a timesaver for the County.

Deputy Manager Williamson stated that she had not heard any complaints from employees about the insurance rates. She stated that she was impressed with the pool.

Manager Paschal stated that she the 6 percent cap and the \$200,000 in claims that would have to be paid if the County left the pool were reasons to consider remaining in the pool.

### **Action Items:**

Manager Paschal introduced the approval of Audit Contract with Thompson, Price, Scot and Adams Certified Public Accountants.

As a follow up to a discussion at the retreat, it was the consensus of the Board to get the current auditors under contract so they can begin work on the 2024 audit. There is not enough money budgeted to get the 2023 and 2024 audits completed at the same time. A budget amendment of \$85,000 will be required at the February 17, 2025 meeting.

Chairman Yarbrough asked for a motion to suspend the rules. A **motion was made** by and **seconded by**. The motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Commissioner Smith and seconded by Commissioner Gwynn to approve the contract with Thompson, Price, Scott and Adams Certified Public Accountants Interim Clerk to the Board. The motion carried unanimously.

### **Discussion Items:**

#### Fiscal Policy

Manager Paschal stated that this item was a continuation from the retreat. She asked the Board to consider approving the fiscal policy at the February 17, 2025 meeting. She added that the policy was a good tool for the County to make sound financial decisions and would give staff direction about the Board's goals and how to achieve them.

Chairman Yarbrough asked the Board if they had questions. There were no questions. The policy will be considered for action at the February 17, 2025 meeting.

#### FY 2025-2026 Board Goals

Manager Paschal recalled the item from the retreat. The facilitators completed the summary of the Board's goals. Manager Paschal would like to share the draft goals at the upcoming budget kickoff.

Chairman Yarbrough asked if there were questions or comments. There were no questions or comments.

### Leasing Co-Square Space to Healthy Community Alternatives Program

Manager Paschal stated that the Health Community Alternatives Program (CAP) currently leased space at 2254 NC 86 in Yanceyville. The lease expires in March 2025. She recapped an analysis that showed that the membership fees prior to the fire in 2024 covered over 200 percent of the cost, so the County was realizing revenue in 2024. She stated that in an effort to increase utilization of the facility, the CAP program would be a win/win. CAP's lease is paid by Medicaid revenue and won't be taken out of the County's budget. The proposal is to lease four adjacent offices. CAP currently pays \$2850 per month. Staff proposes to set the lease amount at the same rate they currently pay (\$1850 plus the cost of utilities and internet for a total of \$2500 per month). She disclosed that the current landlord reached out to the Health Department to offer to lower the monthly cost by \$300. The Board could consider matching the offer to lower the \$300 a month. The County would realize \$30,000 in revenue with the \$2500 rental amount that is currently paid to someone else. She suggested a 3-year lease to offer consistency to CAP.

Commissioner Wrenn stated that the Health Board recently had the same discussion. CAP wanted to utilize Co-Square initially and it would be a win/win situation for the County. Manager Paschal felt the Health Department located in the building would help to generate traffic.

Commissioner Smith noted that approximately 42 percent of the building would be leased to County offices. Manager Paschal outlined the space that would be used. None of the spaces are near the front of the building.

The Board questioned the \$300 rent reduction to \$2200. Manager Paschal felt it would be in the best interest of the health department to secure the lower rate.

The item will be placed on the February 17, 2025 agenda for action.

### Discussion on Finance Officer Recruitment – Next Steps

Manager Paschal presented two options for the Board's consideration. One option is to readvertise the Finance Officer position at the higher salary range. She was concerned that the difficulty of the situation that the person would encounter may cause them not to be interested. There is currently someone who is being paid by the Association of County Commissioners who has worked on the issues for the past two years and who is fixing them. She proposed increasing Johnna's time and cost share the salary with the Association. If the County shares in the salary cost, she can work between 8-16 hours additional hours per week and be on site for a second day. She currently works 24 hours per week. The Manager felt that this would be the best solution until the 2024 audit was completed. More research needs to be done to determine if Johnna can be named as the Finance Officer under a contract. Until a determination is made, Melissa Miller will continue to serve as Interim Finance Officer and Johnna will continue under a different