

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF GUILFORD COUNTY
WORK SESSION**

Greensboro, North Carolina
January 7, 2021

The Board of County Commissioners met in a duly noticed Work Session at 3:30PM in the Blue Room located on the first floor of the Old County Courthouse, 301 W. Market St., Greensboro, NC.

PRESENT: Chairman Melvin “Skip” Alston, presiding; Vice Chairman J. Carlvena Foster; Commissioners James Upchurch, Kay Cashion, Alan Perdue, Carly Cooke, Justin Conrad, and Mary Beth Murphy. Participating via virtual communication: Carolyn Q. Coleman.

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: County Manager Michael Halford; County Attorney Mark Payne; Clerk to Board Robin Keller; Alex Smith, Budget Director; Derrick Bennett, Interim Finance Director; Don Campbell, Emergency Management Division Director; Heather Skeens, DHHS-DSS Director; Sharon Barlow, Economic Services Division Director; Dr. Iulia Vann, Public Health Director; various members of County staff and media. Virtual participation was made available to the general public and the media.

I. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Melvin “Skip” Alston welcomed those present and called the meeting to order at 3:38PM.

II. NEW BUSINESS

A. SUMMERFIELD FARMS DISCUSSION

David Couch with Summerfield Farms shared that by now each commissioner has had a detailed one on one meeting. He noted that there is currently no district for moderately priced housing. The Town of Summerfield is struggling to meet acceptable housing options. David Couch asked the Board to appoint a small delegation of staff to study the feasibility of tax funding of a water sewer development.

Commissioner Carolyn Q. Coleman in at 3:43PM via virtual communication.

Couch noted that it is their goal that an additional tax levy on the Summerfield Farms Village District to help subsidize the costs. He reiterated that no tax payers from the city of Greensboro or Summerfield who do not reside in the proposed special taxing district will be taxed.

Chairman Alston clarified the asks of appointing staff to research the development request, and the second request is for Greensboro to take on the debt through bonds to fund the project. He clarified that the County would be subject to collect the taxes for the proposed service district and provide those funds to the City of Greensboro to cover their costs.

Chairman Alston noted that the request is to provide a tax incremental financing to cover the costs of the development. He noted that there is some confusion from some of the conversations with the City of Greensboro as to whom would be responsible for the funding.

Commissioner Conrad asked if the proposal can be forwarded to the Board electronically.

Commissioner Cashion clarified that all of the proposal is online. She questioned whom they would like to be on a team to investigate the proposal.

Couch stated that he would assume a planner as well as legal counsel, but really that decision would be up to each local jurisdiction.

Chairman Alston shared that the manager's team could include commissioner Cooke access to the information as it does fall in her district. He asked if staff could keep the full board up to date.

Commissioner Conrad noted that Summerfield Farms is in his district as well and that he would like to be included in the conversations.

Commissioner Conrad noted that we looked into a water authority for the northwest quadrant, he noted that Rockingham County and Reidsville were included in water feasibility.

Couch stated that while water is integral part, they also need the sewage lines run as well.

Commissioner Cashion noted that Commissioner Conrad and Commissioner Perdue have been involved in the water feasibility and would be valuable assets.

Commissioner Perdue noted that public safety should be included in the staff conversations as water services has been a huge concern in that area.

Couch noted the builder's study conducted regarding dispelling the fears that they are not a water rich community, when they do have access to water. But that in order to eliminate additional wells being drilled on the property, and to protect Higgins lake, it is better implement a sewer system.

Motion was made by Commissioner James Upchurch and seconded by Commissioner Mary Beth Murphy, to recommended that staff form a group to work with the jurisdictions.

VOTE: Motion carried 8-0

AYES: Melvin “Skip” Alston, Alan Perdue, Carolyn Q. Coleman, Kay Cashion, Justin Conrad, James Upchurch, Mary Beth Murphy, Carly Cooke

NOES: None

ABSENT: J. Carlvena Foster

III. UPDATE ON GUILFORD COUNTY COVID-19 INITIATIVES

B. RENTAL AND UTILITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

DHHS-DSS Director Heather Skeens noted that the US Treasury has committed \$25 billion for rental assistance as of this morning. Staff have completed that application, and we will be eligible to receive those funds. We will not know how much funds until after January 11. We can review the County rental assistance program.

Sharon Barlow, Deputy Director of DSS, shared that the County has allotted \$5 million for a rental and utilities program. Staff are recommending creating an online application program, with funds made payable to the landlord or the utilities company. Barlow reviewed the program eligibility requirements of the proposed program. Barlow also shared that if needed, they could offer paper applications.

Skeens stated that as of now, we don’t know what from the Treasury we would be entitled to receive. We think it will be greater than \$5 million. There are some slight differences in the County’s eligibility requirements and the US Treasury requirements so if we use Treasury dollars, we would need to shift to those requirements. The Treasury is offering twelve (12) months’ worth of support versus the County’s proposal for three (3) months.

Skeens noted that the basic eligibility guidelines are similar.

Chairman Alston asked if the Board can receive copies of the US Treasury guidelines.

Skeens stated that Treasury funds require payment to the landlords, but if the landlord does not want to participate, we can issue checks to the tenant. Also, the landlord could apply for the funds on behalf of the tenant.

Commissioner Coleman asked for clarity, on the statement that we could not make payments unless they could not sustain falling back in arrears. she stated that our goal is to keep individuals from losing their homes.

Barlow shared that one of the items DSS covers is case management, so if a family is in a place where they cannot make payments for the next couple of months, perhaps we can get them into a placement that is within their rental means, and we can help them use those funds on a deposit and help them with additional resources to have a more sustainable placement.

Skeens reiterated that case management would be for the County plan, as we wouldn't want to pay two (2) months' rent and they still lose their homes. But using the US treasury plan that would cover fifteen (15) months, the issue with losing their homes would be alleviated.

Commissioner Cashion noted that NACo is holding a seminar tomorrow at 1:00 to help address some of the questions regarding this topic. She questioned if the County has already applied?

Skeens stated that, yes, the County received the information today and has already submitted our application. She shared that our recommendation would be that if we are eligible for these funds, that we would recommend not doing the county program and moving those \$5 million into another program.

Commissioner Cooke questioned case management for those that are facing eviction, if we move forward with the County program would deposits for new placements be a part of the program?

Barlow responded that it doesn't make sense to pay two (2) months of rent for them to be evicted on the third month, so we may use those funds for deposits.

Commissioner Coleman asked staff to share their current process.

Perdue questioned the impacts of a discussion given some previous recusals on this topic?

County Attorney Mark Payne clarified that engaging in discussion is fine since they aren't looking for a vote.

Commissioner Upchurch asked how soon our program and the federal program could be implemented. He noted that the federal program does not cover mortgage assistance, but I think it is worth waiting to see what the federal program brings.

Payne noted that all of the funds must be distributed within 30 days of the adoption of the bill, so this should move fairly quickly, and we may be able to tailor these programs very quickly.

Skeens clarified that the County program does cover mortgages, the Treasury program does not.

Chairman Alston noted that evictions are also being held so there is a little time to wait until we hear more from the Treasury program.

County Manager Michael Halford noted that Greensboro is also eligible, so we would want to work with them to ensure that we have two pots of money in our community if possible.

Skeens noted that staff will be moving forward one way or another with a start date of February 1st.

Commissioner Cooke questioned what the need is for mortgage assistance in our community?

Commissioner Coleman noted that Greensboro has a mortgage assistance program that included placing individuals in a hotel for one night if needed.

Skeens stated that NC State, under NC HOPE, someone could apply for mortgage and rental assistance program. They have since ran out of money, but we do not have access to those funds.

Skeens noted that her DSS team is seeing tremendously high utility bills due and they are having to choose feeding their families over paying their utilities.

By General consensus the board directed staff to proceed with plans to move forward as presented.

C. FEEDING THE COMMUNITY

Commissioner Coleman introduced the item. She stated that the distribution sites would be using ten (10) churches and non-profits. She stated that we chose these locations as we have worked with these programs in the past with very successful results.

Commissioner Coleman reviewed that the program will feed 5,000 families. She shared that it is their goal that these boxes carry people through the winter. She shared that with additional funds, we can continue the program or add additional locations.

Commissioner Upchurch shared that we also need to include a site in the rural and northwest quadrant.

Commissioner Coleman shared that we can add some additional churches.

Commissioner Conrad offered a location. He questioned if those providing the food have committed in writing the price of the food as the prices are far less than the national average.

Commissioner Coleman shared that they are working with a large meat packing company and they have committed to the costs. She shared that we are trying to commit to getting vegetables from at least two minority farmers.

Commissioner Cooke questioned the cost of one box?

Commissioner Conrad noted that it is roughly \$60 per box to feed a family of 4 for two weeks.

Motion was made by Commissioner Carolyn Q. Coleman, and seconded by Commissioner Kay Cashion, to move to accept food program proposal.

VOTE: **Motion carried 8-0**

AYES: **Melvin “Skip” Alston, Alan Perdue, Carolyn Q. Coleman, Kay Cashion, Justin Conrad, James Upchurch, Mary Beth Murphy, Carly Cooke**

NOES: **None**

ABSENT: **J. Carlvena Foster**

D. ARTS & CULTURAL GRANT PROGRAM

Commissioner Cashion discussed the Arts Greensboro CARES funding. She provided a funding proposal for the board to consider.

Laura Way, President of Arts Greensboro, provided an update on the arts program. She noted that Guilford County leads the state and we’re the champions in supporting the arts in our state.

Commissioner Foster in at 4:48PM

Way noted that on the second pass of funding they worked very hard to get the marginalized organizations. She noted that with the additional \$200,000, they are recommending using the existing listing.

Chairman Alston noted that he had also heard some concerns that not everyone was aware of the program. He questioned if there is any way to allow additional time.

Way shared that we certainly can reopen the application process, and especially if we know which target areas were missed. She shared it is their intent to support any arts program that is eligible.

Chairman Alston questioned that if we can advertise for an additional week using previous avenues used and for any commissioners who may know of some organizations in need to let them know.

Commissioner Coleman questioned the formula for determining how much was given to each group.

Way stated that they had a panel of external reviewers based on their expenses, their reentry plan to come back after the pandemic, and how did they serve Guilford County. There was a scoring mechanism based on eligible expenses and how much they have already received in CARES funding.

Commissioner Upchurch asked if they could get send some of the marketing material to the board to help share.

Commissioner Cashion stated that in the interest of trying to determine if there are others out there, that we reopen through the 15th and let anyone else apply. She questioned if they go through the 15th can they get the message out timely?

Commissioner Coleman asked if we could extend to the 20th.

Commissioner Cashion shared that she would be amenable to that.

Commissioner Cooke thanked Ms. Way for all of her efforts and her willingness to reach all areas of the community.

A. CHILDCARE AND EXTENDED LEARNING CENTER PROGRAMS

Barlow provided an update on the extended learning program. We have operated that program since August and to date they have served 181 children.

Commissioner Foster thanked DSS staff for their hard work.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS

The Board celebrated Carly Cooke's Birthday.

V. ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 5:06PM.

Melvin "Skip" Alston
Chairman

Robin Keller
Clerk to Board