

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

Greensboro, North Carolina
May 1, 2025

PRESENT: Vice Chairwoman J. Carlvena Foster, presiding; Chairman Melvin “Skip” Alston; Commissioners Kay Cashion, Brandon Gray-Hill (entered the meeting at 3:45 p.m.), Mary Beth Murphy, Carly Cooke, Frankie T. Jones, Jr. (entered meeting at 3:50 p.m.), Pat Tillman, and Alan Perdue.

ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: County Manager Michael Halford; County Attorney Andrea Leslie-Fite; Clerk to Board Robin Keller; Deputy Clerk to the Board Ariane Webb; Deputy Clerk to the Board T’ebony Rosa; Assistant County Manager Victor Isler (via virtual communication); Assistant County Manager Jason Jones; Finance Director Don Warn; Planning Director J. Leslie Bell; Community Environmental Services Program Manager Lorelei Elkins; GCS School Superintendent Dr. Whitney Oakley; GCS Deputy Superintendent Dr. Julius Monk; GCS Chief Financial Officer Tyler Beck; members of staff, media, and the public. Virtual participation was made available to members of the public and media partners.

I. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Alston welcomed those present and called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

II. NEW BUSINESS

A. SOLID WASTE HAULER FEE INCREASE & LICENSE REQUEST

Chairman Alston introduced the agenda item and recognized Community Environmental Services Program Manager Lorelie Elkins.

Elkins provided an overview of the waste hauler license renewal and requested rate increase with an automatic annual escalator. She indicated the unincorporated areas of the county that are serviced by the waste haulers. She reviewed the county population represented by the haulers covered in the county. She reviewed the price change requests and the average increase.

Elkins described historical information pertaining to previous Board-approved hauler fee increases. She explained the automatic escalator to coincide with CPI-U from 2020-2025. She shared average adjusted rates with an average of \$29.25. She noted additional hauler requests to be placed in the licensing agreement.

Elkins reviewed the options for franchise renewal rates, future increases, and presented collection fee options for Board consideration. She mentioned the staff recommendation is to reevaluate requests in July 2028, considering legislative and market impacts.

Commissioner Cooke sought clarification regarding the Customer Bill of Rights.

Elkins confirmed that the information will be included in tonight's regular meeting agenda.

Commissioner Cooke questioned the 60-day impact.

Elkins confirmed a July 1st date.

Planning Director J. Leslie Bell confirmed an option of August 1st or, depending on a Board vote, for a rate increase first and then a 60-day date to be determined. He reviewed the options for the Customer Bill of Rights. He noted you can do one vote for the rate increase, and then a second vote to address the 60-day notice for the Bill of Rights.

Commissioner Cooke questioned a rate increase of July 1st and immediate customer notification rather than ten (10) days.

Elkins acknowledged waste hauler representatives in the audience.

Commissioner Murphy questioned the Retreat conversations regarding Republic Service's billing cycle. She reiterated the importance of customer notice and to potentially adjust tonight's requested action. She echoed Commissioner Cooke's recommendations that as much notice as possible be provided to the customers.

Republic Services Senior Area Manager Tracy Nestor noted that prior to 2022, the residential notification was thirty (30) days and then it was changed to ten (10) days. She explained that the intent is for immediate customer notice. She shared that three (3) month billing cycles are standard based on the date of service.

Vice Chairwoman Foster noted that due to their billing cycles some customers will get different notice timelines.

Nestor noted a newspaper advertisement will be submitted.

Commissioner Perdue requested staff recommendation.

Elkins confirmed that staff recommended a \$29.25 CPI-U rate with a 4% cap effective January 1, 2027 and to revise the language at next license approval in July 2028.

Commissioner Tillman requested an explanation regarding the CPI-U.

Nestor noted that the CPI-U is specific to industry costs. She spoke to the Department of Labor and Statistics and to the specific index that uses the commodities that apply to our industry, such as labor costs, fuel, and steel. She noted that the CPI-U is a verifiable source.

Commissioner Tillman questioned the Solid Waste Management Strategic Plan. He noted that it would be helpful.

Elkins confirmed getting a snapshot of trash collection trends countywide along with the unincorporated areas, future trends, potential legislative impacts, and new industries.

Commissioner Cashion questioned the newspaper notification.

Nestor confirmed an additional bill insert to all customers and a My Resources website alert.

Chairman Alston sought clarification regarding staff recommendations of moving the fees to \$29.25.

Elkins confirmed the fee increase to \$29.25 and then apply the July CPI-U with a 4% cap in January 2027.

Chairman Alston clarified that the percentage is up to 4%.

Nestor confirmed that the price increase to 4% will make us whole. She noted that since the index is aligned with our costs, the CPI-U percentage will be no higher than 4%.

Commissioner Cooke sought clarification regarding negotiated municipal rates.

Nestor confirmed that those municipal agreements are separate contracts. She shared that this grants us exclusivity in the town limits.

Commissioner Tillman inquired if there was interest in a Board action during the Work Session.

Vice Chairwoman Foster shared that the Board could vote at the Work Session if they so choose to.

Commissioner Perdue addressed the County Attorney and questioned a modification of the staff recommendation.

County Manager Halford noted that the CPI-U update would be effective annually beginning January 1, 2027 and each January thereafter.

Chairman Alston questioned how long will this be in affect.

Elkins confirmed a re-evaluation at the next licensing update and renewal in 2028.

Motion made by Commissioner Tillman, seconded by Commissioner Mary Beth Murphy, to adopt the recommendation of staff with a CPI-U Trash (July) with an up to 4% cap in 1/1/27, and set the rate of \$29.25 effective August 1, 2025, to coincide with the license approval notification.

Discussion ensued regarding notice timing, adjusted start dates, and prorated charges.

Commissioner Murphy suggested a friendly amendment of August 1st with an up to 4% cap.

Commissioner Tillman accepted the friendly amendment.

Commissioner Murphy suggested a friendly amendment to retain the \$3 charge for back-door services.

Commissioner Tillman accepted the friendly amendment.

Commissioner Perdue suggested a friendly amendment to change the Customer Bill of Rights from a ten (10) day notification to a sixty (60) day notification.

Commissioner Tillman accepted the friendly amendment.

County Attorney Andrea Leslie-Fite reiterated clarification of the motion due to the friendly amendments.

The updated motion: The Board adopt the recommendation of staff with a (1) CPI-U Trash (July) with (2) an up to 4% cap on January 1, 2027, (3) set the rate of \$29.25 effective August 1, 2025 to coincide with the license approval notification, (4) retain the \$3 charge for back-door services, (5) change the Customer Bill of Rights from a ten (10) day notification to a sixty (60) day notification.

The motion carried unanimously.

Nestor thanked the Board for its support and investment in the community.

B. GUILFORD COUNTY SCHOOLS' FY 25-26 BUDGET REQUEST

Vice Chairwoman Foster recognized GCS School Superintendent Dr. Whitney Oakley, GCS Deputy Superintendent Dr. Julius Monk, and GCS Chief Financial Officer Tyler Beck.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley introduced the agenda item and provided an overview of the GCS budget. She mentioned moving up their budget window in an effort to get communication to the Board of Commissioners as soon as possible. She provided a brief overview of K-12 public education and the improved academic outcomes since the pandemic. She noted that teachers and principals are working very hard to close those learning gaps. She shared that they have launched new partnerships with Toyota and Apple to help offset budget needs.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley explained how GCS defines excellence, critical thinking skill development, and neighborhood schools. She spoke to sustained success of four (4) focus areas to include (1) Accelerate learning, (2) Recruit, retain, and reward top talent, (3) Strengthen health, wellness and safety in schools, and (4) Prepare students for the world.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley reviewed the historical enrollment trends for Guilford County and the decline in enrollment. She shared that they are preparing to talk to the Board of Education on boundary reassignment. She shared that they remain focused on maintaining and improving enrollment. She shared that two (2) teams have been working to analyze current practices and research strategies and develop a comprehensive transition plan for key academic transition points. She described how they are working to improve the customer service experience, including signage, messages, and how we answer our phones. She shared that they hope to

develop better transition points for students and share information for CTE pathways and early college learning options.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley spoke to a Guilford Experience working group to enhance the family and student experience. She highlighted the three (3) goals of (1) Align Academic Pathways, (2) Enhance and Scale the GCS Story, and (3) Consistent and Robust Customer Service. She explained enrollment strategies and transition points from 5-6 and 8-9 grades. She noted community partnerships with Ready for School/Ready for Life and Shift_ed. She shared 9th-grade academies to develop a better sense of belonging.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley noted seven (7) schools moved off the low-performing list along with record high graduation rates. She shared safety system improvements with over 110 schools converted to a new video management system and 5,950 cameras upgraded. She highlighted the lack of federal funding for federal mental health grants. She spoke to ESSR dollars used for a new centralized radio system ran on the Guilford Metro Communications systems, all new radios for Transportation and portable radios for each school and key central Office positions. She shared radio upgrades for buses and areas with poor cell tower coverage.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley noted that teachers matter more than anything else and spoke to the teacher supplement, to staying compensation competitive, and to peer jurisdictions offering supplements. She spoke to the additional state teacher supplement that seven (7) of the 100 counties including Guilford County are excluded. She explained that the budget recommendation includes an increase of a \$10M request for teacher supplements.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley reviewed the market values and pay rate increases over time for classified worker positions. She spoke to the issues with compression that they have. She explained dual college enrollment opportunities, corporate investments, direct industry entrance post-high school graduation, removing transit barriers. She noted that Guilford County students took 10,024 college courses this past year through Career and College Promise program or at an early/middle college. She noted their business partnerships for pipeline programs for the workforce. She spoke to collaborations with Toyota and Apple. She noted the number of kids learning industry credentials at the time of graduation.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley highlighted servicing exceptional students with special needs without state funding. She explained that this population can be aged three (3) to twenty-two (22) years of age. She noted that GCS is at capacity with those autism diagnosed. She noted that 15.2% of overall enrollment is identified as having individual educational plan needs. She noted that all their exceptional children (EC) pre-K classrooms are full.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley shared academic efficiencies by including combination classes to meet state classroom size mandates. She noted they have reduced exceptional children teacher allotments and reduced online instructional resources. She shared that they reduced professional

teacher learning and sought philanthropic efforts to support learning supplies (books, fees, and tutoring).

Superintendent Dr. Oakley noted thirteen (13) schools and eleven (11) administrative buildings are to be closed or consolidated, and spoke to boundary alignment to stretch dollars. She shared staff hiring freezes and central office consolidation. She shared transportation efficiencies to include (1) Realignment of bus routes, (2) Implementation of non-transport zone, (3) Utilization of choice shuttle points, (4) Modified bell schedule for public separate schools, and (5) Increasing the activity bus rate. She recognized GCS Chief Financial Officer Tyler Beck.

Chief Financial Officer Beck continued the presentation by noting FY 25-26 GCS budget recommendations. He shared mandatory expense increases to include legally required and sustaining operations costs of approximately \$10.6M. He explained approximately \$3.6M for safety and security expenses without use of ESSR dollars. He described the obligated pass-through amounts to charter schools. He noted an estimated \$29.7M in compensation.

Chief Financial Officer Beck noted an approximately \$314M operating budget. He shared a total budget recommendation of approximately \$947M.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley closed out the presentation by highlighting budget priorities to include (1) Increase in pay for teachers and frontline workers, (2) Implement grades and steps for school nutrition staff, (3) Continue school safety strategies, and (4) Support non-bond maintenance projects. She spoke to increasing student outcomes.

Commissioner Murphy questioned slide 34 (Closing 13 school buildings and 11 administrative buildings) regarding facility consolidation. She inquired into timeline information and sought clarification regarding the color-coded boxes.

GCS Deputy Superintendent Dr. Julius Monk confirmed the 2026 academic year to allow for school closing adjustments. He acknowledged which schools were closing and which were consolidating.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley explained that the FY 26-27 closures require Board of Commissioner action that also require a mandated public comment period to revise boundaries.

Commissioner Murphy questioned portions of the request regarding staffing. She explained the compensation crisis with classified staff and its direct impacts. She spoke to custodial needs, to bathroom cleaning, to health concerns, to transit route challenges, and to finding creative ways to help our students.

Commissioner Cashion questioned the \$9M loss of the mental health grant, especially for youth. She emphasized the need for services to combat suicide, substance misuse, and other issues. She further questioned a state budget allocation and potential coverage.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley confirmed that they just found out about the grant cuts two (2) day ago. She explained that it was a federal grant for local (county) and state, but the entire grant was

terminated on Tuesday. She noted that the future is uncertain, but there are plans to appeal the decision. She shared that this was a five (5) year grant with three (3) years to go. She emphasized that the funds were to be used by the end of December, but now we must adjust our grant plan since spending must match the application details.

Commissioner Tillman questioned slide 30 (GCS EC Enrollment) and slide 31 (GCS EC PreK Enrollment) regarding the no daily allotment for special needs children aged three (3) to four (4) years. He opined on state resources for these programs.

Chief Financial Officer Beck confirmed that allotments are only for K-12, but Smart Start is separate in the state budget. He explained that the federal government has pre-school grants but no allotments.

Commissioner Tillman spoke to slides starting on page 33 regarding the efficiencies and requested staff provide associated numbers.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley confirmed accurate data for next year. She shared that the adjustments presented for the next academic year. She noted that today's figures are projections only.

Commissioner Tillman noted the ¼ cent sales tax and garnering voter confidence.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley confirmed that our whole community must come through on that campaign effort.

Commissioner Jones questioned slide 51 (2025-2026 Total Budget Recommendation) and the additional \$7M from the \$277M amount.

Chief Financial Officer Beck confirmed that it was fees, fines, forfeitures, other local appropriations, and investment income.

Commissioner Jones questioned the approximately \$4.2M in other local sources and investment interest on slide 46 (2025-2026 Local Current Expense Fund).

Chief Financial Officer Beck confirmed fees, fines, and forfeiture increases along with trend history that included an outlier.

Commissioner Jones sought clarification on reconciling slide 47 (2025-2026 Federal Grants Fund) federal allotments of \$54M and slide 51 (2025-2026 Total Budget Recommendation) of \$82M in federal funds.

Chief Financial Officer Beck confirmed that ESSR funds were in last year's budget with a liquidation period. He shared that we are returning to pre-pandemic numbers where the expectations are more realistic.

Commissioner Jones questioned the FY 25-26 federal planning allotments from NCDPI have not yet been released statement listed on slide 47 (2025-2026 Federal Grants Fund).

Chief Financial Officer Beck anticipated June 30th to encapsulate that within the budget resolution. He noted there are two governmental entities involved.

Commissioner Jones further questioned slide 51's child nutrition figure of \$52.5M as a flat rate and not an associated formula.

Chief Financial Officer Beck confirmed that it is an enterprise fund where they generate the same revenue. He shared that the line item has been held constant due to risk but predicts the participation numbers will increase drastically due to growth, as more students are receiving breakfast, lunch, and a snack.

Commissioner Perdue expressed appreciation to the Superintendent and GCS staff for the presentation. He emphasized safety as a top priority. He questioned the scanners and requested clarification of comprehensive high schools.

Superintendent Dr. Oakley confirmed technology improvements with touchless walk-through scanners located at entryways. She highlighted the challenges of adjusting to a new normal.

Commissioner Perdue highlighted the importance of cell coverage and expressed opposition to legislative bans on cellphones during educational hours. He noted previous school incidents where first responders were contacted via cellphones. He spoke to a congressional FirstNet Authority Program aimed at creative problem solving.

Chairman Alston requested staff provide itemized dollar figures regarding projected efficiencies. He reiterated education, and not advocacy, focused on the ¼ cent sales tax.

Commissioner Cooke questioned maintenance expenditures on slide 43 (Capital Outlay Fund 2025-2026). She inquired into the \$25M and how to identify non-bond eligible requests.

Chief Financial Officer Beck confirmed that the \$25M was in the county's general fund. He shared that GCS has exceeded that amount, which limits our flexibility. He explained that some expenses will be shifted from federal to state funds and as a result we implemented some of the mentioned efficiencies with compensation and staff.

Deputy Superintendent Dr. Monk explained that some repair projects that went out for bid were not bond eligible. He confirmed that preventative maintenance and repair are not bond eligible.

Vice-Chairwoman Foster noted time constraints.

Commissioner Tillman questioned projected equipment life cycles for chillers and boilers.

Deputy Superintendent Dr. Monk confirmed some schools have several different types of equipment in several buildings. He provided examples of parts needs, total equipment failure, and unexpected weather conditions. He spoke to a 2018 assessment that was used to develop the Master Plan and prioritization list.

Vice-Chairwoman Foster recognized County Manager Michael Halford to review the next agenda item.

C. GUILFORD COUNTY FY 25-26 BUDGET PLANNING PROCESS

County Manager Halford introduced the item and provided an overview of the Fire Districts. He provided recommendations for the Fire District funding policy choices.

Commissioner Murphy shared that she would like to go ahead and address immediately this using ARPA-investment earnings to make the districts whole and adopt the necessary tax rates.

Commissioner Perdue echoed Commissioner Murphy's recommendation. He noted that our rural fire districts have a limited ability to raise funds as residential taxes do not provide sufficient revenue for fire protection infrastructure.

Commissioner Cooke shared that we should go ahead and help them balance their budgets, but with the understanding that we will help them with capital projects that they have been saving for and not necessarily to make payroll. She questioned that if we do not do this today, that direction be provided that the funding will come with the budget.

Commissioner Tillman echoed support for making the Fire Districts whole. He shared that it would be reasonable to pull funds from ARPA investments, and if it is more expedient to do this way, then let's do that.

Chairman Alston shared that he concurs that we are going to make them whole, but we should be hesitant to do that today. He requested from staff to see the ARPA-utilization impacts and evaluate the fund balance.

Motion made by Commissioner Mary Beth Murphy, seconded by Commissioner Alan Perdue, to direct the County Manager and staff to take action to make the Rural Fire Districts whole using a one-time appropriation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Investment Earnings in the amount of \$2,264,427.

Commissioner Jones noted that he would like staff to work more collaboratively so that we do not set a precedent. He voiced concern that these districts are serving municipalities that are not only affluent but also choosing not to fund their fire agencies. He expressed support for the motion as presented.

The motion carried unanimously.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business for this agenda.

IV. ADJOURN

There being no further business, the work session was adjourned by unanimous consent at 5:30 p.m.

Melvin “Skip” Alston
Chairman

Robin Keller
Clerk