



# **GUILFORD COUNTY COMMISSIONERS' RETREAT**

**January 23-24, 2025**

North Carolina A&T State University  
Alumni-Foundation Event Center  
200 N. Benbow Road, Greensboro, NC 27411

## **MINUTES**

*The Board of County Commissioners met in a duly noticed RETREAT on January 23, 2025 at 8:00 a.m., North Carolina A&T State University Alumni-Foundation Event Center 200 N. Benbow Road, Greensboro, NC 27411.*

**PRESENT:** Chairman Melvin "Skip" Alston, presiding; Vice Chairwoman J. Carlvena Foster; Commissioners Brandon Gray-Hill, Carly Cooke, Frankie T. Jones, Jr., Mary Beth Murphy, Kay Cashion, 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 Board Ariane Webb; Deputy Clerk to Board T'ebony Rosa; Assistant County Manager Erris Dunston; Assistant County Manager Victor Isler; Assistant County Manager Jason Jones; members of staff, media, and the public. Virtual participation was made available to members of the public and media partners.

### **DAY 1 – JANUARY 23, 2025**

#### **WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Melvin "Skip" Alston called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. and expressed appreciation to NC A&T State University for hosting the two-day Retreat. He recognized County Manager Michael Halford.

Halford provided an overview of the Board priorities survey results. He highlighted four (4)

years of reflection during the pandemic and a switch to a pandemic recovery mode. He spoke to a transition from crisis mode towards a five (5) to ten (10) year future community planning model. He noted the strategic plan and Board direction prior to the March Board Retreat. He shared some Board exercises and pre-work with the question, “*What is important for you to see reflected in the FY 25-26 budget?*” and allotted five (5) minutes for completion.

## **STRATEGIC & RECOVERY PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATES**

Halford shared that this morning’s session is to receive direction on launching the county with the next fiscal year’s budget and followed by our March Retreat with more strategic conversations on where we want to go, guided by the vision and direction of the Board. He introduced his presentation with an aviation metaphor of elevation viewpoints, slot control, defined destination points, and team landing decisions. He spoke to concepts regarding financial stewardship, customer service, community building, and constituent roles.

Halford reviewed the strategic planning framework benchmarks. He reviewed that the Board has completed defining their mission vision and values, and have worked to include public input, and have documented an action plan.

Halford noted community feedback, amending trends, and reflecting on the past four (4) years. He spoke to fiscal years, and to strategic planning framework benchmarks to coincide with the county’s core values. He highlighted the National Association of Counties (NACo) EDGE Excellence in Strategic Planning Award and noted that only Buncombe County has received this designation.

Vice Chairwoman Foster questioned the systematic goal of strategic planning.

Halford confirmed that planning models can end up being unused and placed on the shelf; However, he urged the Commissioners to use these plans to handle the broader issues and achieve better outcomes in reaching long range goals.

Commissioner Cashion questioned several community outreach efforts as an indicators of success.

Halford confirmed key indicators of success and the meaning of healthcare providers, sub-indicators of success, connecting them back to the larger structure, and short- and long-term budget planning.

Commissioner Cashion noted that the process of working towards the goal is also a measurement of success; highlighting the work being done in behavioral health.

Halford noted prioritizing strategies and aligning fiscal stability. He spoke to a pathway towards success.

Commissioner Cashion questioned Buncombe County’s protocols.

Halford confirmed the NACo framework pieces. He noted sharing those aspects during the March Retreat.

Vice Chairwoman Foster questioned responsibility and accountability levels and who is

responsible for developing framework impact.

Halford confirmed the shifts between the Board and staff direction, communication and shared responsibility.

Commissioner Tillman questioned metrics, data, and accountability.

Halford noted strategic management is a Board choice. He shared the framework components and requested the Board share its pre-work responses.

Commissioner Tillman noted the Homelessness Taskforce and Public Safety. He questioned potential gaps.

Halford shared that there is an aggregation of stress tiers and there must be decisions regarding operational and tactical goals.

Commissioner Cashion questioned the strategic points.

Halford indicated assisting with developing those points.

Commissioner Perdue questioned meeting public needs. He shared that successes include construction industry inspections, social services customer service, public safety response times, and Family Justice Center clients. **He requested staff provide concrete examples of gaps in service instead of connecting them to a particular framework.**

Halford spoke to tactical indicators such as children in poverty, safe places, and food insecurity. He noted that this is an exercise to rethink what the county does well.

Commissioner Cooke spoke to progress, to organizing overarching results, and to satisfying the frameworks.

Halford continued the presentation by describing how the county transitioned from pandemic crisis to allocating federal resources. He shared the funding stream is ending and the projects must narrow. He spoke to the Ready, Set, Go analogy in alignment with the county's vision statement. He spoke to several goals paired with each of the three (3) governmental sections – Successful People, Strong Community, and Quality Government. He noted prioritizing resources associated with each section.

Halford noted service delivery and initiatives for Successful People to include integrated service delivery, data systems, opioid responses, Continuum of Care (CoC) collaborative applicant, Veterans support, healthcare, gun violence, food security, therapeutic care staffing, Medicaid expansion, foster care, mental health, residential recovery programs, GC STOP programs, GC School System facilities and health services, and the Ready/Ready and Shift\_Ed collaborations.

Halford shared budget considerations for each Successful People initiative. He requested Board direction regarding opioid care, CoC positions, food security, and social services positions.

Halford outlined goals aligned with Strong Community to include Emergency Management, Animal Services, Sheriff's Administration building, Rural Fire Districts, EMT Academy, fire

hydrant installation, housing stability, and medical respite care. He recognized Assistant County Manager Victor Isler.

## **HOMELESSNESS TASKFORCE UPDATE**

Isler provided Homelessness Taskforce updates and explained the study's context. He noted post-Covid housing instability, workforce housing, and data limitations. He shared federal funding, service limitations, and restrictions. He highlighted listening and learning sessions across peer jurisdictions with best practices presentations. He spoke to visiting a permanent affordable housing site during the NACo conference. He mentioned the challenge of pivoting due to a morphing housing problem and to consider transportation, workforce needs, and community investment. He noted using a diversity lens and understanding service gaps over a multi-year process.

Isler spoke to growth opportunities and to considering several categories. He shared common goals, entry barriers, partnerships, culture shifts, investments, and the need for a CoC lead agency to nurture our effort across this multi-agency collaboration. He noted a spectrum of involvement and exploration of incentivizing housing inventory, growth opportunities, supporting stability, and increasing low barrier shelters. He shared alignment with policies, procedures, and regulations regarding the collaborative applicant and lead role.

Chairman Alston questioned the collaborative applicant evaluation procedures.

Isler confirmed an annual metric evaluation that polls CoC membership that is shared with county leadership.

Chairman Alston questioned the amount of times the United States Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD) increases funding.

Isler confirmed that \$177K for the CoC that is formula determined. He recognized CoC Program Director Cheri Neal.

Neal confirmed that the HUD formula is determined by data submitted. She shared that the funding typically stays the same but has increased incrementally over time. She noted there is no additional funding request. She shared that they factor in the point-in-time count and two (2) other reports to determine eligibility. She spoke to an approximately \$3M eligibility in the future.

Commissioner Tillman noted a recent NACo conference that highlighted how Houston, Texas solved its homelessness issue and is considered a national model. He shared that Houston received over \$50M of HUD funding with a multi-county effort entitled *The Way Home* and since 2014, over 32K people were served.

Isler confirmed there is power in coordination along with administrative engagement and responsibility.

**Chairman Alston requested staff secure a spokesperson from Houston to present on this matter.**

Neal shared another funding opportunity and spoke to coordinating with the City of

Greensboro on the application process.

Commissioner Murphy noted that a professional colleague in South Dakota spoke to purchasing and converting old school grounds to a center known as *The Care Campus* with wraparound services, low barrier entry, and employment services. She urged the county to learn from other jurisdictions and model best practices. She further highlighted there are opportunities to build from our own successes and continue to collaborate with our own partners. She emphasized that the extent to which we can continue to lead and help drive these efforts is imperative.

Commissioner Cashion noted that Guilford County needs to be the lead agency and then make the investment for public-private collaborations. She shared that the county needs to take responsibility on this position for the homelessness issue. She noted that programing is fantastic, but progress can only be made by increasing housing. She shared her support of the county to step out and take the lead on perhaps a public-private housing initiative.

Isler noted that the lead agency designation is bestowed by the CoC and is revisited every five (5) years.

Chairman Alston questioned the lead agency's responsibilities.

Isler confirmed there needs to be thought leadership around strategic priorities and convening partners and subject matter experts. He shared methods to implement and plot progress along with creating and preserving a graded funding plan. He noted that the current memorandum of understanding (MOU) indicates the county has a passive leadership role and must be revisited as we are at the five (5) year mark.

Neal mentioned overlap with the GC School System around data, interfacing, wraparound service needs, and superintendent discussions.

Commissioner Jones highlighted apprehension around an unfunded mandate with a lack of understanding and misinformation. He urged MOU analysis to curb public-private competition. **He recommended peer jurisdiction review.** He questioned new federal administration mindset shifts.

Neal noted significant changes and expenditures with the new federal government administration. She shared uncertainties regarding future funding allocations. She noted engaging in dialogue and a plan of action going forward.

Commissioner Cooke spoke to shared responsibilities of local government and not to redirect community resources. **She requested information regarding the funding stream and additional information on the lead applicant.**

Commissioner Tillman shared apprehension in alienating partners and learning best practices with peer jurisdictions.

Chairman Alston highlighted working as One Guilford with multiple collective agencies.

Isler concluded his presentation with an acknowledgement of the risk and magnitude of the lead agency plan. He noted cross-jurisdictional commitments and changing strategic priorities.

Halford continued his presentation to highlight goal alignment with Strong Community to include capital improvement projects within Guilford County such as Gibsonville, Jamestown, Oak Ridge, Pleasant Garden, Stokesdale, and Summerfield.

Commissioner Jones highlighted Windsor Chavis Nocho Community Center support and suggested this goal align with #4.

Halford outlined goals aligned with Quality Government to include pandemic-related funding, school bond funding models, county facility assessment, demolishing the old Animal Shelter, and safeguarding data assets by establishing an information technology (IT) security framework. He further explained responsible data governance and a digital government transformation. He spoke to enhanced county-resident communications for future town halls and updating the website.

Commissioner Murphy questioned the timeline regarding the website upgrades and branding.

Halford confirmed not having Communications Department leadership during a transition phase. He outlined a re-engagement strategy for design and layout.

Commissioner Murphy questioned securing a design firm.

Halford confirmed forward movement within the next month.

Halford continued his presentation to highlight workforce stabilization and increasing Attorney Office capacity to support E-Court rollout. He noted alignment with the One Guilford initiative to include broadband expansion, accessible transportation, the Legal Support Center, and public-private economic development opportunities.

Halford presented department director post-pandemic feedback from community, organization, and department parameters. He spoke to a workplace climate study, to inter-departmental collaborations, to employee compensation and retention, to service levels, to business plans, to technology enhancements, and to sustainability.

Halford ended the presentation by highlighting the FY21-27 strategic plan and several questions for the Board to ponder.

**The Board recessed the retreat at 11:00 a.m. and reconvened at 11:15 a.m.**

## **TRANSPORTATION RFI UPDATE/ACTION**

Halford continued the presentation by highlighting the Transportation Taskforce Request for Information (RFI) update and recognized Commissioner Cooke's efforts.

Assistant County Manager Erris Dunston spoke to previous listening sessions, to partner meetings, to pilot programs, and to public-private stakeholders.

Commissioner Cooke reiterated that there is a shared vision to provide a spectrum of offerings. She provided an overview of the pilot programs to fill in gaps identified from community conversations.

Pandemic Recovery Policy Analyst Amy Addington-Boyd provided an overview of the request for proposals (RFP) process to determine the current providers list. She identified representatives available to speak to their two (2) year project proposals.

Dr. LaKisha Ellison, Sheriff's Office Behavioral Health and Wellness Coordinator, spoke to the twelve (12) month re-entry services program for five (5) justice involved individuals needing rapid re-housing. She spoke to peer support, to recovery treatment, and to medical benefits.

Dr. Ellison noted that re-entry services is an umbrella term, that involves jail diversion and the local re-entry council. She noted that the Sheriff's Office received a grant from the City of Greensboro to help engage those that are justice involved to help provide housing. She noted that they are proposing a pilot program to pay up to six (6) months' rent and help those exiting the justice system on a sustainability plan. She shared that this is a client-centered program that requires individuals to attend substance abuse and mental health treatment and case management. She stated that the transportation grant would help the participants secure affordable housing, improve client success, and decrease recidivism.

Addington-Boyd spoke to the pilot funding ideas based on the request for proposals (RFP) submissions with a recommended funding total of \$474,724.

Vice Chairwoman Foster questioned bus passes.

Addington-Boyd confirmed setting up accounts for service accessibility.

Jessica Schultz, Goodwill Industries Career Development Services, spoke to the Goodwill *Rides to Work* program. She shared the organization's mission, success stories, and rideshare services with over eighty (80) participants. She spoke to a goal of decreasing transportation barriers. She noted program criteria to include population served, programmatic strengths, skilled career navigators, success indicators, and a two (2) year budget summary.

Chairman Alston questioned reviewing alternative rideshare methods such as a van service or public transit.

Schultz confirmed working with the employer for creative solutions.

Halford noted trying a combination of alternatives through these pilot programs.

Chairman Alston expressed support to allow for ease of job transition.

Commissioner Cooke noted that the sixty (60) to ninety (90) days creates stabilization that could be transferred to a different program. She stated that the data collected can be shared with transit partners regarding service delivery and demand.

Commissioner Tillman shared the benefits of employer incentive programs to ride share and coordinate on transportation if they have multiple shifts.

Sarah Dison, Guilford Community Care Network, and Sara Moscarelli, Center of Excellence for Integrated Care Senior Project Manager, spoke to the *Transit with Care* pilot program.

They spoke to behavioral and mental health care offerings and barriers to entry. They explained real-time experiences with the advocacy workgroup transporting clientele. They spoke to the populations served, to project goals, to outcomes, and to potential expansion. They explained the quantitative and qualitative methods for performance measurement.

Vice Chairwoman Foster questioned caregiver crisis training.

Dison confirmed required caregiver crisis training.

Moscarelli highlighted High Point's involvement in this work.

Addington-Boyd spoke to the UNC-Chapel Hill data evaluation protocols for each pilot program.

**Motion made by Commissioner Carly Cooke, seconded by Commissioner Mary Beth Murphy, to approve the allocation of up to \$474,724 for the proposed pilot programs from the \$1 million allocated to ARPA Enabled Funds supporting transportation initiatives and authorize staff to take any and all necessary actions including but not limited to execution of necessary contracts and any necessary budget or fund transfer/amendments to launch the projects.**

Commissioner Murphy expressed support for the programs.

Commissioner Cashion questioned the alignment with established recovery programs and behavioral services.

Commissioner Cooke confirmed scaling up services to fill gaps and entry barriers.

Halford spoke to connecting services to provide increased accessibility.

Commissioner Tillman expressed interest in calls for service data for transit needs.

Commissioner Perdue noted that the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee recently met and **expressed interest in having representatives present a holistic approach.** He shared that transit is a component.

Chairman Alston questioned the budget balance.

Halford and Commissioner Cooke confirmed low expenditures from the \$1M and not spending all the funds during the pilot program process.

Halford spoke to multiple Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and the power of strategy.

Chairman Alston questioned ARPA fund utilization.

Halford confirmed that these are ARPA-enabled programs.

**The motion carried unanimously.**

**WORKING LUNCH 11:30 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.**

**FY 2024-25 REVENUE/EXPENSE REVIEW AND FY 2025-26 EARLY REVENUE/EXPENSE PROJECTIONS**

Halford introduced this item and spoke to revenue growth levels, to not having a budget shortfall, to compounding impacts surrounding choices of using the fund balance to support reoccurring expenses, and to Board direction.

Halford provided an historical overview of prior revenue and expense budgets since FY14 along with inflationary impacts. He spoke to the FY24 budget that increased funding for GC Schools and Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC), to compensation plan implementation, to addition positions, and to a \$6.2M increase to fund balance. He displayed graphical depictions to indicate commitments and expenditures.

Commissioner Murphy questioned the fund balance requirements.

Halford confirmed \$70M which is approximately 8%. He noted that as expenses grow the percentage increases. He explained other components of fund balance to include restricted and assigned funds. He spoke to FY25 budget to include increases to GCS and GTCC operating budgets, to deferred maintenance, and to using school bond interest. He explained the one-time zero-revenue budget impacts.

Commissioner Cooke questioned the law enforcement pay increase impacts.

Halford confirmed the \$6M expense.

Commissioner Cashion noted that a majority of the expenses focus on compensation.

Halford confirmed Board re-structuring the employee compensation scheme. He shared a decrease in employee morale and increased vacancies.

Commissioner Tillman questioned the size and scope of the personnel pay structure. **He requested additional information regarding the number of consultants on the payroll, their job descriptions, and contract duration by the next work session.**

Halford confirmed that the county does not use a lot of consultants. He shared that the Help Desk is contracted out. He noted having the data prepared and ready by tomorrow.

Chairman Alston questioned the \$11.1M.

Halford confirmed non-recurring funds to include facility maintenance, vehicles, technology, and school bond interest.

Chairman Alston questioned actual expenditures and whether the retiree health benefits are re-occurring.

Halford confirmed annual retiree health benefit expenditures. He cautioned not using fund balance for re-occurring expenses.

Commissioner Murphy questioned the \$1.55M GTCC capital.

Halford confirmed GTCC has \$3M remaining funds.

Discussion ensued regarding 2/3 bonds, GTCC responsibility, and county priorities.

Halford noted current projections for FY25. He expressed concern regarding negative pressure on our financial ratios. He urged the Board to cease using fund balance for regular operational expenses.

Commissioner Murphy questioned internal policy and statutory requirements.

Halford noted peer county comparisons due to population holding 20-22%. He noted having the data ready by tomorrow.

Halford further explained the various funds that comprise fund balance. He highlighted primary revenue sources such as property tax, sales tax, federal and state funds, user charges, and fund balance. He noted FY26 revenue projections to increase by 1.8%. He urged Board considerations regarding fiscal stewardship and limiting fund balance usage.

Chairman Alston questioned last year's actual increases instead of conservative estimates.

Toy Beeninga, Budget Director, confirmed 2.6% property taxes, 3% sales tax, and a decline in federal/state revenue from 93.8% to 83.9%.

Commissioner Perdue questioned the maturation of economic development projects.

Halford confirmed project revenues are determined based on that budget year.

Beeninga further explained the increased payout to coincide with incentives.

Commissioner Murphy questioned projections over the last decade have been exact. She noted that historically there should be confidence in current projections. She questioned proposed projections.

Beeninga confirmed an actual and amended budget and the expansion and collapse of funds.

Commissioner Murphy questioned a \$3M gap with current spending to cover fund balance.

Halford confirmed a projected \$18M deficit.

Chairman Alston noted looking at possible savings opportunities.

Halford shared an estimated 2.1% property tax base, a slower sales tax growth than prior years, sales tax projections, federal/state reimbursements, and additional investment earnings.

Taking a point of personal privilege, Chairman Alston paused the presentation to recognize North Carolina A&T State University Chancellor James R. Martin, II.

Dr. Martin provided welcome remarks and spoke to the future of the Piedmont Triad Region, the economic forecast, and a vision for the future. He noted the historical importance of coming together and moving forward. He shared our national security interests and our ability to align with a discipline and a strong sense of purpose. He shared a vision of developing human potential, how to inspire knowledge, develop people, and cultivating relationships. He spoke to emotional intelligence and crafting a future together. He emphasized one ecosystem, regional financial investments, and staying connected.

Following Dr. Martin's remarks, Halford continued the presentation and spoke to general fund expenses, to areas of county dollar allocations, to major expense drivers, and to budget considerations. He noted budgeting for positions where \$8M equates to 4% lapsed salary credit and overtime.

**Chairman Alston requested staff to provide data regarding the number of vacant positions for at least six (6) months.**

Beeninga confirmed 310 current vacancies with most designated as law enforcement positions.

Commissioner Cooke questioned overtime expenditures. She clarified that we are not getting a lot of savings in vacancies due to overtime.

Halford confirmed.

Commissioner Jones questioned the confusion surrounding the full allocations for the educational budgets. He noted an approximate \$50M set aside for school expenses. He shared the multiplier effect with every \$1 of county funds that affects other service areas. He requested a better explanation to create a heightened understanding of the budget.

Chairman Alston questioned annual bond interest.

Halford confirmed usage either for paying down bond debt or for funding other bond projects. He shared additional investment earnings.

Commissioner Jones noted re-engaging and communicating with new school system members to gain better perspective.

Halford suggested an all-encompassing meeting with the GC Schools and not solely a Joint Capital Facilities subcommittee.

**There was a consensus of the Board to expand the communication effort.**

Halford continued the presentation by noting that major county facility needs include approximately \$98M in remaining deferred capital. He noted FY26 general fund projections.

Chairman Alston requested no tax increase but to fund all aspects of county services. He shared a desire to not cut or decrease any services.

**The Board recessed the retreat at 2:56 p.m. and reconvened at 3:15 p.m.**

## **TAX DEPARTMENT PROJECTIONS**

Vice Chairwoman Foster recognized Tax Director Ben Chavis.

Chavis explained the reappraisal process and spoke to new positions, to a state award winning dashboard, to technology tools, to heightened customer service. He noted the current status of residential and commercial reappraisals.

Chavis spoke to statistics regarding median residential home values in addition to apartments, hotels, and office buildings. He noted upcoming community outreach sessions and an educational campaign in collaboration with the Communications Department.

Chavis concluded the presentation with an overview of equitable property valuation protocols, enhanced communication tools for the public, increased transparency, and a better appeal process.

Commissioner Murphy questioned equity around the 2020-2021 process of mis-evaluating properties. She urged not following historical trends.

Chavis confirmed a nationwide effort to address equity. He spoke to the new data analyst position to review market data. He shared a closer look at some market areas to identify trends. He noted the external statistician to review data.

Commissioner Murphy questioned slide 5 (Sales Ratio Study Since 2022).

Chavis confirmed pandemic impacts to the market and spoke to minimum housing inventory. He shared a prediction of positive markets in this area.

Commissioner Tillman noted a trend of fixed income homeowners not interested in selling but experiencing challenges in affording taxes. **He requested data on the number of homes sold during the last valuation.**

Chavis confirmed trends across peer jurisdictions. He noted providing information on home sales.

Commissioner Cooke questioned what triggers re-evaluation procedures.

Chavis confirmed statutory triggers in NC General Statute §105-286(a)(2) if the population is over 75,000.

Commissioner Jones questioned determination of which sectors are driving the valuation discrepancy.

Chavis confirmed stratifying median market sales and price ranges.

Chairman Alston questioned appeal percentages.

Chavis confirmed less than one (1) percent.

Chairman Alston noted the consumer sticker shock and shifting property valuation sentiments. He noted a program discussion regarding tax assistance. He opined a reappraisal every four (4) years instead of five (5) years.

Commissioner Murphy sought clarification of cycles from the last re-evaluation.

Chavis confirmed there are eleven (11) months remaining and they should have ballpark percentages.

Commissioner Perdue questioned actual sales price impacts on property valuations.

Chavis confirmed not duplicating prior behavior because that led to bidding wars and price hikes.

## **DIRECTOR SPEED ROUNDS**

The room was divided according to Successful People, Quality Government, Strong Communities department directors. The speed rounds consisted of brief synopsis of opportunities and challenges.

**RECESS MEETING UNTIL FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2025 AT 8:30AM**

**The Board unanimously consented to recess the retreat at 4:51 p.m. to reconvene tomorrow, Friday, January 24, 2025 at 8:30 a.m.**

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Melvin "Skip" Alston  
Chairman

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Robin Keller  
Clerk