

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

Greensboro, North Carolina  
September 19, 2019

The Board of County Commissioners met in a duly noticed Work Session at 3:00PM in the McAdoo Room located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the BB&T Building 201 W. Market St., Greensboro, NC.

**PRESENT:** Chairman Alan Branson, presiding; Vice Chairman Jeff Phillips; Commissioners Kay Cashion, Melvin “Skip” Alston, J. Carlvena Foster, Carolyn Coleman (in at 4:17PM), and Hank Henning

**ABSENT:** Commissioners Justin Conrad, and Alan Purdue

**ALSO PRESENT:** County Manager Marty Lawing; County Attorney Mark Payne; Robin Keller Clerk to Board; Deputy County Manager Clarence Grier; Scott Baillargeon, Deputy Clerk to Board; Angela Miller, Lockton Company; Carol Campbell Human Resources; Ray Willis Human Resources; Graham Rothrock, Human Resources; Michael Halford, Budget; Jim Albright, Emergency Services Director; members of staff, community, and media.

**I. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Alan Branson called the meeting order at 3:24PM

**II. REVIEW PROPOSED RESULTS OF EMPLOYEE CLASS AND  
COMPENSATION STUDY**

County Manager Marty Lawing introduced and spoke to the agenda item. He provided an update on the timeline of the study, and noted that he had allotted additional time for a more comprehensive review of the data including modifications to the salary grades. He shared that Lockton Company and staff were ready to present the proposal to the Board. He encouraged the Board to review the positions and departments found to be most impacted by the study. Lawing turned the floor over to Ms. Angela Miller, Sr. Compensation Consultant and Sr. Vice President, representing the consulting firm Lockton Company.

Ms. Miller recapped the definitions of the study, which had been gathered over the previous year, and shared with the Board that all steps in the project had been completed to order. She noted, that since the Board’s last work session, the salary structure had been revised to accommodate 32 grades from the previous 44 grades. She discussed the salary grade ranges among Guilford County’s peers and similar government units. She noted concern that to effectively compete with

other units, more differentiation among the range spread was needed to obtain accurate compensation. She reviewed how revising the current structure of 44 Grades would be more in line with the market. She elaborated the differences between the current 44 Grade scale juxtaposed with the suggested scale of 32 Grades. She emphasized that the changed model allows for more fluidity among employees to reach market/midpoint grades sooner.

Ms. Miller shared the overall best practices and those salary structures currently implemented by the County's peers. She spoke to the creation of three structures for: 1) EMT/Fire personnel; 2) the Sheriffs/DSO salary structures, and 3) all other positions as well as the certifications necessary to retain these structures.

Chairman Branson questioned the process for how the structure changes would accommodate new-hires with similar-type trades from other cities and counties. He asked Lockton to share the process for how the proposed structure would account for time and tenure at other government entities. He also asked Lockton to define "meets performance" expectations, and where salary structures had been combined, and how the County fared among similar governmental entity's salary.

Ms. Miller stated that new-hires, with similar experience, would come in at the higher level in accordance with their experience and education in order to maintain equity. She reviewed the proposed Step Process for Fire/EMS and Law Enforcement, which allows employees to move up the pay scale and receive merit increases based on the outcome of annual performance reviews. She noted that the study included a custom survey based on the County's peers; neighboring cities and counties, and the collected data schedules were based on those findings. She emphasized that Guilford County currently ranked 92% in market pay among its peers.

Ms. Miller reviewed the recommendations of the study; and emphasized that the findings suggest raising salaries to meet the minimum market grade analytics as collected by the County's survey of peer groups.

Lawing elaborated the details regarding the grade mid-ranges.

Commissioner Cashion asked about the percentage of current employees that were already at the midrange.

Graham Rothrock, Guilford County Human Resources Recruiter, shared that nearly half of all County employees were at the midrange and based on years of service and proficiency they many should be further than midpoint. He noted further that within the current plan, 85% of employees were currently below the midpoint of the revised grade schedules.

Vice Chairman Phillips inquired about the rubric for how employees would be evaluated, and expressed concern with the 'step process' that fairness be maintained countywide.

Ray Willis, Human Resources Manager, stated that employees would be periodically evaluated to ensure fair treatment, and that every employee would be critiqued the same to meet expectations as outlined in individual job descriptions.

Jim Albright, Emergency Services Director, noted that under the existing merit structure, certain employees were not compensated in a timely manner. He spoke to limited progression among his department and stated that his team had fallen significantly below market. He emphasized that the process Lockton suggested was a great step in the right direction for maintaining retention for his department.

Commissioner Alston asked how the program, if implemented, would impact the County's overall budget.

Michael Halford, Budget Director, spoke to the allocation of County dollars already committed in the budget to include the new grade structure. Halford also requested to ensure clarity that the term "market" be defined by Lockton.

Ms. Miller discussed the guidelines and definitions of the term "market". She clarified that market was defined as the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of the salary structure or midpoint salary range comparable with other like job positions. The actual dollar amount affixed to the employee, she noted, would ultimately be determined by the applicant/employee who shows proficiency in the/their position.

Commissioner Alston questioned process for how the market was determined, and what would attract potential candidates to consider employment with the County if the pay were below market. Alston further noted that he would like some assurances that the County would remain an attractive place for employment seekers, so to attract the best talent.

Discussion ensued among the Board, Lockton, and staff concerning the disparate experience levels of new-hires; assurances that the County's entry-point would remain comparable to market values to attract talented individuals; the costs of turnover in comparison with retention; the goal to slow turnover numbers and minimize the high-costs associated with training new-hires.

Vice Chairman Phillips asked if the amount included the cost of employee benefits. He reviewed the Boards current demands to address essential services the County is tasked with at present. Phillips noted that priorities and compensation would need to be scrutinized to ensure that employees understand the process and be aware of the multitude of variables that exist. He emphasized caution regarding a hasty decision.

Lawing spoke to projections that would afford the plan in the budget in the upcoming years. He noted that they would also need to consider different perspectives to uncomplicate the process. He noted that, if either option was implemented the 3% merit pool may need to end, but stressed that other options would exist further down the road. He emphasized the high cost and demands associated with high turnover rates, and noted that if the County reduced those rates would have a positive impact on the County's future budgets.

Commissioner Alston asked if the plan included the increase of the minimum wage to at least \$15 per hour; Alston clarified stating he was inquiring countywide.

The Board discussed the complexity of the options and the difficulty to set a minimum base-salary with compression.

Albright further emphasized that the majority of EMTs are currently below \$15.00 an hour.

Ms. Miller discussed the options and models before the Board. She elaborated the details of compression issues among other similar entities, and noted that the County was in a similar situation where the individual positions must be considered. She emphasized that 'Option 1' moves base-salaries up faster while saving the County overall dollars and would impact 54% of the employees, which was slightly more positions than 'Option 2'. Miller asked if there were any other questions before discussing the two options.

There being none, Miller spoke to 'Option 1'; the cap on salaries; reviewed the cost impacts associated with 'Option 1'; and the number of employees throughout the County that need to move closer to the midpoint range.

Ms. Miller turned to 'Option 2'. She outlined the nuance differences from those of 'Option 1'. She noted that 'Option 1' would be less expensive for the County to implement.

Lawing provided the number of employees that would be impacted by both options. Lawing spoke to the differences among the options and the 3% performance merit pool. He noted that he prefers employees to be critiqued by their performance.

Willis spoke to the County's process of the merit pool, based on performance, and the impact to employees. He ensured the Board that the weight metrics could be adjusted to find more favorable cost results for both employees and the County.

Board discussion ensued concerning the merits of both options.

Halford emphasized that either options would make a positive impact on County and its employees.

Commissioner Coleman arrived at 4:17PM

Willis reiterated the high rates concerning voluntary and involuntary termination turnover. He noted that the numbers were excessive; however, shared that the data collected from exit interviews provided ample insight that the County continues to address those blind-spots that discourage performance and retain future talented employees.

Commissioner Coleman expressed concern that more time was needed to study the options before she could cast her vote. She questioned the high-rate of turnover among Social Services Eligibility Caseworkers, and inquired about the salary adjustments for those positions. Coleman requested a copy of that data during a later meeting.

Willis shared there were a total of 103 caseworkers either option would positively impact.

Discussion ensued among the Board.

Ms. Miller discussed the jobs that would impact employees from 'Option 1', and identified the similarities between the options. She spoke to the midpoint averages among employees and noted that most employees were either close to, or had reached, market among the positions listed.

Commissioner Cashion asked for more clarification on performance measures.

Lawing shared the process for how the merit pool works among departments and Countywide.

Discussion ensued among the Board regarding the best practice.

Lawing added that 10% of the positions are those that have the highest turnovers. He encouraged the Board to decide on an option today. He discussed the projections for future compression issues.

Commissioner Coleman asked which positions were the lowest paid.

Willis stated they know that Transit Workers receive the lowest salaries.

Commissioner Coleman emphasized that she had been working to raise that salary for ten years

Rothrock stated that they would earn approximately \$13.00 an hour with 'Option 1'.

Willis shared that EMTs and Eligibility Case Workers would also see an increase in their salaries. He emphasized that more attention would be given to market rates.

Commissioner Coleman requested specific information concerning pay increases for people that are overworked and underpaid.

Clarence Grier, Deputy County Manager, provided additional feedback to Commissioner Coleman regarding the shifting salaries of case workers.

**A motion was made by Vice Chairman Phillips, and seconded by Commissioner Hank Henning, to approve 'Option 1' of the New Salary Structure as Presented by the Lockton Company's Compensation Study.**

**VOTE: Motion carried 7-0**

**AYES: Alan Branson, Jeff Phillips, Hank Henning, J. Carlvena Foster, Kay Cashion, Carolyn Q. Coleman, and Melvin "Skip" Alston**

**NOES: None**

**ABSENT: Commissioners Perdue and Conrad**

### **III. OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business to discuss.

### **IV. ADJOURN**

There being no other business, the Board adjourned by unanimous consent at 5:00PM

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Chairman J. Alan Branson

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Clerk to Board