

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

Greensboro, North Carolina
September 2, 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 (in at 3:53PM); Commissioners Mary Beth Murphy, Kay Cashion, Carly Cooke, Alan Perdue and Carolyn Q. Coleman (in at 5:01PM).

ABSENT: Commissioners Justin Conrad and James Upchurch.

ALSO PRESENT: County Manager Michael Halford; Assistant County Manager Jason Jones; County Attorney Mark Payne; Clerk to Board Robin Keller; Ariane Webb, Deputy Clerk to Board; Heather Skeens, DHHS Director, Dr. Iulia Vann, DHHS Public Health Division Director; Jim Albright, Emergency Services Director; members of staff and media. Virtual participation was made available to the general public and media.

I. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Melvin “Skip” Alston welcomed those present and called the meeting to order at 3:40PM.

II. NEW BUSINESS

**A. REVIEW REVISIONS TO EXISTING BOARD OF HEALTH RULES:
REGULATIONS GOVERNING HEALTH HAZARDS, POTENTIAL
HEALTH HAZARDS AND GUILFORD COUNTY WELLS**

Dr. Iulia Vann, DHHS-Public Health Division Director, introduced the item and Joe Johnson, Public Health Environmental Services Program Manager, who led the presentation on the well rules. He noted the packet included a one-page summarization of the proposed well rule changes.

Dr. Vann stated the Guilford County Board of Health Well Rules have been in place since 1989. She shared Guilford County has been a pioneer in best practices in well system and water quality management, but no revisions have been made to the policies in the past ten (10) years.

Dr. Vann reviewed the updates and noted the majority of changes are designed to align the County with state rules, clarify language and address new technology that was not available ten (10) years ago. She stated the updated rule eliminates criminal penalties for rule violations and clarifies language related to sewer lateral separation distances.

Dr. Vann discussed modifications related to the casing of a well, which should now be at 43 feet. She noted the state has a variety of options dependent upon topography and soil types, but the goal is to standardize the placement of well casings.

Johnson shared the goal is to simplify this rule and noted local well drillers have stated the change will increase the cost of well drilling by approximately \$15. Johnson provided additional information regarding the relationship between sewers and well laterals, and how new technology has resulted in water-tight sewer laterals.

Vice Chair J. Carlvena Foster arrived to the meeting at 3:53PM.

Commissioner Kay Cashion questioned the average depth of a well being dug today.

Johnson estimated the average well depth is approximately 200 feet, as wells are now deeper due to fluctuations in the water table, and noted he would provide her with the exact data.

Commissioner Cashion clarified the casing keeps surface water contaminants from entering wells.

Johnson confirmed.

Commissioner Alan Perdue commented on the last two (2) wells he had drilled, which averaged between 840-940 feet. He questioned if local well drillers were involved in crafting the rule updates.

Dr. Vann confirmed and noted that staff have a good relationship with local well drillers and often seek their input with regards to policy.

Johnson stated the updated rules were reviewed by 8-10 of the most in-demand well drillers in Guilford County.

Commissioner Perdue questioned the potential negative impact these rule changes might have upon individuals who need well repairs but have limited site capabilities to add a new well.

Johnson stated that while the changes are part of the state rules, there is now more latitude and allowances to drill closer to the prior well.

Commissioner Carly Cooke questioned the intent of the presentation.

Dr. Vann stated the intent is to introduce the proposed well rule changes and set a date for a public hearing to receive citizen input on the changes.

Commissioner Cooke expressed her interest in having additional time to study the well rules.

Commissioner Cashion spoke to citizen complaints she has received regarding certain health hazards and questioned if Planning & Development staff have similar authority to enforce compliance.

County Attorney Mark Payne stated both Planning & Development and Public Health staff have civil penalty authority when addressing violations, and confirmed the Solid Waste department has sufficient staff to conduct enforcement activities and ensure compliance.

Commissioner Perdue shared his discussion with the County Manager regarding certain complaints related to overgrown properties and other violations. He recommended developing a matrix that the public and staff could use to identify which department would enforce certain rules, and encourage staff to create effective measures that assist citizens in complying with county regulations.

Dr. Vann reviewed the investigation processes when a complaint is received. She noted the multiple steps involved in enforcement, including orders of abatement.

Payne spoke to challenges associated with enforcement of regulations for abandoned properties.

Motion made by Commissioner Kay Cashion, and seconded by Vice Chair J. Carlvena Foster, to schedule a public hearing to consider revision of the existing Board of Health regulations governing Health Hazards, Potential Health Hazards, and County Wells in Guilford County.

VOTE: Motion carried 6 - 0

AYES: Melvin "Skip" Alston, J. Carlvena Foster, Mary Beth Murphy, Carly Cooke, Kay Cashion, Carolyn Q. Coleman, Alan Perdue

NOES: None

ABSENT: Justin Conrad, Carolyn Q. Coleman and James Upchurch

B. UPDATE ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO GUILFORD COUNTY CODE OF ORDINANCES CHAPTER 4 – AMBULANCE SERVICES

Jim Albright, Emergency Services Director, stated the intent of the presentation is to provide a system update and context to proposed changes to the Ambulance Services ordinance. He spoke to the impact of the pandemic upon hospitalizations and emergency services.

Albright shared they are currently resourced to run 84,000 calls annually, but the pandemic has added an additional 1,000 calls per month, specifically in July and August 2021, which creates tremendous workload. He noted the demand for ambulances now exceeds capacity.

Albright noted when ambulances are not available, the response time is increased. He noted the goal response times for significant life-threatening events is reaching the individual in less than nine (9) minutes at least 90% of the time. He shared his staff are currently able to achieve this metric 55% of the time.

Albright spoke to the County's robust fire department response system, and noted while they are receiving assistance from these teams, the challenging is getting a paramedic to these calls. He noted it now takes over thirteen (13) minutes to get an ambulance to a call where someone is not breathing, and confirmed they are now falling out of compliance for delta level calls for chest pain or shortness of breath, as well.

Albright spoke to the incredible workload stress the pandemic has placed upon the healthcare system and its employees, which is unsustainable. He stated his challenges include staff attrition, injuries and illness, along with significant delays when dropping off patients at hospitals, as there are no beds available. Albright reiterated these limited resources are stressing our emergency services and healthcare system.

Albright discussed the importance of including an emergency provision in the ordinance that allows staff to grant time-limited, emergency contracts with non-franchised providers to assist Guilford County Emergency Medical Services.

Chairman Alston questioned the change to the ordinance and the potential to add more emergency service resources.

Albright explained the amendment and shared they are trying to be creating in order to gain more resources, and noted many private ambulance services have gone out of business over the past 5-7 years. He shared the County would not be able to absorb the volume of calls if they lost its sole provider for non-emergency care.

Chairman Alston questioned if cost was an issue and if there were other options that could encourage these vendors to assist the County.

Albright stated there is currently a capacity issue in healthcare which requires the County to work with the resources available. He confirmed that the County ordinance regulates and requires the vendor to charge the rates set by the Board of Commissioners.

Payne noted the contracting process can be conducted quickly once the ordinance is in place.

Vice Chair Foster thanked Albright for the presentation and questioned who the County currently contracts with for emergency services.

Albright spoke to the history of the County's current contract with Piedmont Triad Ambulance & Rescue (PTAR), but noted they are also managing staffing shortfalls. He noted they are unsure where they will find additional vendors for these services and spoke to the declining interest in EMT and Paramedic credentialing at this time. Albright spoke to declining volunteerism and commitment, even with non-profit ambulance services, and shared Forsyth County's non-emergency transportation provider closed last week, which has deeply impacted their healthcare system.

Commissioner Perdue spoke in support of the recommended amendments and recommended the addition of designee language to the ordinance. He discussed loss of staffing due to burnout, and noted many of our paramedics can earn a comparable salary in neighboring counties, while running 1/3 of the call volume. Perdue spoke to the importance of incentivizing employees to remain with the County and in this career path.

Albright shared paramedics are now being recruited by hospitals to join the nursing teams, due to shortfalls in this career, and emphasized the importance of rewarding those who choose to remain with the County.

Chairman Alston noted this is a statewide issue and questioned how we address these issues.

County Manager Michael Halford recommended incentive pay for first responder positions and noted neighboring counties are paying comparable and higher pay rates.

Commissioner Cashion noted this is a vital segment of the County's employee base and spoke to the importance of taking time to evaluate bonus pay and support for these employees.

Commissioner Cooke stated emergency services is a part of the County's infrastructure and questioned what steps are being taken to educate the community on the appropriate time/circumstances to call an ambulance.

Albright noted they are working with their healthcare providers on appropriate messaging and stated all segments of healthcare are working at capacity. He spoke to the level of pandemic fatigue that is compressing the system and stressing employees.

The Board discussed appropriate educational messaging that does not discourage citizens from calling 911.

Commissioner Cashion questioned the potential to fast track training and hire additional staff.

Albright discussed their efforts to hire, and expedite orientation and training. He stated fire departments are responding to low risk transports to assist with demand, and confirmed Guilford is currently running the fastest paramedic training program in the state.

Motion made by Commissioner Alan Perdue, and seconded by Vice Chair J. Carlvena Foster, to schedule a public hearing, pursuant to N.C.G.S 153A-250, to consider amendments to Guilford County Ordinance Chapter 4 (Ambulance Services).

VOTE: Motion carried 6 - 0

AYES: Melvin "Skip" Alston, J. Carlvena Foster, Mary Beth Murphy, Carly Cooke, Kay Cashion, Carolyn Q. Coleman, Alan Perdue

NOES: None

ABSENT: Justin Conrad, Carolyn Q. Coleman and James Upchurch

C. UPDATE ON GUILFORD COUNTY AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) FUNDING PLANNING

Halford introduced the item and Simone Robinson with Public Participation Partners (PPP), the consulting group hired to identify pandemic-related community impacts. He noted an example of these impacts is access to healthcare and ARPA funding can be used to identify and address service gaps within the community.

Halford discussed the engagement timeline and noted they have conducted meetings with leadership in certain towns and cities, and will finalize a community survey that will be distributed soon.

Halford discussed project next steps and discussed near-term growth & recovery proposals for impact in qualified census tracts (QCT's). He spoke to the importance of receiving feedback on any collaborative efforts within communities that will bring immediate impact to these areas.

Commissioner Cooke requested more details regarding the request for proposals (RFP) process to target additional dollars towards immediate needs.

Halford explained they will launch a public awareness campaign to local non-profit organizations, the chamber and our municipal partners after the community listening sessions. The goal of the RFP is to identify categories for ARPA fund investment, such as business district repair, access to healthcare, job retention efforts and tourism.

Commissioner Perdue noted many small businesses have expressed they cannot receive assistance and noted there are more jobs available than people to fill the positions. He encouraged talking to business owners to understand how the County can encourage people to apply for jobs to sustain employment rates and business revenue.

Commissioner Cashion expressed her support for the RFP process and noted many citizens are asking questions about the process. She questioned how the proposals would be evaluated.

Halford stated the goal is to advertise the RFP within the next ten (10) days and explained the highest ranked programs will address equity, and will have a clear ability to track and report on outcomes that can satisfy US Treasury guidelines. He noted there will be time allotted to educate the community on these rules and emphasized these proposals will be for long-term investments that support equitable recovery, initially within QCT's.

Commissioner Cashion questioned if the Board would have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and receive presentations from these groups.

Halford confirmed and noted this would occur once the application process was completed.

Chairman Alston requested municipality-specific proposals be vetted and formally approved by the appropriate city or town council before being submitted to the County for consideration.

By general consensus, the Board approved requiring municipality-specific request for proposals (RFP's) be vetted and formally approved by the appropriate city or town council before being submitted to the County for consideration.

Halford introduced the September 2021 community meetings and noted the option to offer premium pay for essential employees and replace public sector revenue losses would require additional staff work and future conversations with the Board.

Commissioner Carolyn Q. Coleman arrived to the meeting at 5:01PM.

Halford discussed the community listening sessions and the areas of focus. He shared PPP would assist with marketing and preparing informational materials. He shared the three (3) questions that would be discussed during the meetings related to the investment areas. Halford introduced the facilitators and their roles.

Commissioner Perdue and Chairman Alston recommended the questions correlate with the four (4) areas of investment to clearly identify how this funding can be used.

Halford spoke to the importance of receiving information on all needs and noted there is an option for revenue replacement that can help support areas beyond the federal investment areas.

Commissioner Cooke questioned the potential to include questions regarding community investment that are not related to the pandemic.

Halford noted there will be opportunity for general comments beyond the questions related to the investment areas.

Commissioner Coleman questioned ARPA funding available for minority businesses.

Halford noted state-assigned funding has more specific requirements for minority business allocation, but local funding includes requirements to prioritize QCT's disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Commissioner Coleman questioned the cost of partnering with PPP.

Assistance County Manager Jason Jones shared the total cost of the contract for the community meetings and broader community engagement is \$66,000.

Halford stated they have contracted with another consulting agency, Guidehouse, to assist with the broadband gap analysis. He shared the economic analysis will identify how jobs have aligned, post-pandemic.

Commissioner Coleman shared she was contacted by a city councilmember regarding a particular vendor for these projects.

Chairman Alston questioned the advantages of using PPP to assist with this process and questioned if the Board would receive a plan for engagement.

Halford spoke to the benefits of working with the group and noted they will facilitate the community engagement process and develop marketing materials, freeing up valuable staff time. He stated the engagement process should be completed by October, with findings available in late fall. Halford confirmed PPP will synthesize the reported community needs, which will be combined with the broader community survey to give a more comprehensive view. He anticipated the external survey should be complete by October or November, with RFP's returned by late fall so the Board can begin making decisions related to funding.

Commissioner Cashion questioned how these organizations will interact with stakeholders.

Halford shared the County has never entered into this level of community engagement, and noted PPP is contracted to conduct at least ten (10) community meetings over the next six (6) months.

Jones shared the community engagement process is designed to complement the RFP process for longer term investments.

Commissioner Cashion questioned if an outline was available for the community meetings.

Simone Robinson, PPP, shared that, outside of the initial five (5) community listening session, they will provide a presentation to the Board, then conduct two (2) virtual open houses, two (2) live meetings and six (6) small group meetings targeted towards groups with the greatest need for funding. She shared they will conduct two (2) county-wide surveys and development of advertising and promotional materials for the meetings, and conclude with a final meeting with the Board to present findings and recommendations.

Commissioner Coleman questioned the district locations for the meetings.

Halford discussed the locations of the initial five (5) community meetings.

Commissioner Coleman expressed concerns about the locations of the meetings.

Clerk to Board Robin Keller provided specific locations for the first five (5) meetings. She noted they are working with GCS to identify schools that are centrally located within quadrants of the county.

Commissioner Mary Beth Murphy spoke to the opportunity for collaboration and shared she is looking forward to sharing with Board and engaging with the public.

Chairman Alston noted that, based upon the tentative locations, at least two (2) districts will be represented at each community meeting.

Halford shared the website available for the public to learn more about ARPA funding and this process.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

Payne stated the US Census data has been received and discussed next steps related to proposed redistricting guidelines. He confirmed he would share demographic information for the current districts.

Chairman Alston requested the Board members notify him if they are interested in serving on the Redistricting Committee, and noted the committee may need to meet next week to review and adopt the guidelines.

IV. ADJOURN

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 5:25PM.

Melvin "Skip" Alston
Chairman

Robin Keller
Clerk to Board