

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

Greensboro, North Carolina
September 8, 2021

The Board of County Commissioners met in a duly noticed Work Session at 4:00PM 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 4:52pm); Commissioners Kay Cashion, Alan Perdue, Carly Cooke, Justin Conrad, Carolyn Q. Coleman, James Upchurch, and Mary Beth Murphy (in at 4:06pm).

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: County Manager Michael Halford; Assistant County Manager Jason Jones; County Attorney Mark Payne; Clerk to Board Robin Keller; Deputy Clerk to Board Jessica Wolf; GIS Manager Stephen Dew; 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 4:03PM.

II. GUILFORD COUNTY REDISTRICTING

A. REVIEW CENSUS 2020 DATA RESULTS AND CURRENT DISTRICTS

County Attorney Mark Payne spoke to the Board. He provided a brief overview of redistricting. He noted that case law notes that if you have a 10% difference, redistricting is warranted. He noted that District 5 is currently the lowest in population and District 4 is showing a 14% increase. District 4 must get a lot smaller and District 5 needs to get larger. District 6 is too large and has to shrink.

Commissioner Murphy in at 4:06PM.

B. REVIEW AND APPROVE GUILFORD COUNTY REDISTRICTING GUIDELINES

Payne spoke to the redistricting guidelines that were presented to the Board. He stated that it would be appropriate for the Board to adopt a set of guiding principles.

Chairman Alston questioned if we could adopt the guiding principles today.

Payne noted that they can adopt those principles today or discuss today and adopt at the next Board meeting. He discussed some of the principles proposed.

Commissioner Coleman spoke to the likelihood of the General Assembly coming behind us and adopting a separate plan.

Payne noted that remains an option.

Chairman Alston noted that we are still required to do our due diligence and go through our process.

Payne confirmed.

Commissioner Upchurch questioned the dates and deadlines to keep in mind.

Payne stated that yes, the most important date is November 18th to have this completed to allow us enough time to submit to elections with time to put election requirements into place.

Payne recommended that we meet next week, and then wait two weeks, and then in October we meet once a week until we have maps that we are comfortable with.

Commissioner Coleman shared that some entities are inviting citizens to participate in the process.

Payne noted that we do want to include citizen participation. The County anticipates receiving a lot of maps. He shared that staff are recommending to setup a website where citizens can submit maps. The County's proposals can be placed on the site as well for public feedback.

Payne noted that draft maps are not public record, but once we have maps ready for board consideration those documents would then be public record.

Commissioner Cashion questioned if staff are proposing that staff establish a proposed plan that the public will review, or are we opening a site where the public can submit recommendations for us to consider?

Payne stated that he would recommend the latter. That we provide a portal where the public can present maps and where the public can view maps. He noted that the methodology is up to the Board.

Commissioner Cashion questioned when the first maps would be developed.

Payne clarified that staff's recommendation is that staff present a public facing portal and allow the public two weeks to submit maps. We have to narrow down the maps by October. We may then choose to start meeting weekly depending on how many maps are submitted for consideration. Payne emphasized that there is one constant, and that is one that the districts will have to change significantly based on the census numbers.

Payne recommended either working directly in the system or asking staff to facilitate map drawings. Stephen Dew, GIS Manager, and Payne will be the points of contacts for the drawing of the maps.

Commissioner Cooke spoke to the guiding principles.

Payne clarified that we will not be able to maximize all the guiding principles. Payne stated that excessive partisanship cannot be considered in redistricting.

Commissioner Cooke asked if we could notate the guidelines that are required and those that are best practices?

Payne stated the County will have to meet a balance between required and best practice.

Commissioner Cooke asked if we are planning on having a public hearing?

Payne stated that a public hearing is not required. He shared that we are going to receive input from the public, and a public portal will be a much more effective way to get input and allow comment more so than a public hearing.

Commissioner Upchurch asked if Payne has done any background research on the number of districts in other counties.

Payne stated that there are few counties that have 9 commissioners, perhaps 3 out of 100. The Commissioners are not required to keep the same number of districts, and it is their discretion to create the number of districts that they feel is appropriate.

Chairman Alston stated that he would prefer to have a public hearing on a final map that the Board is considering. He shared that it is his preference that we adopt a map that the public is aware that the Board is considering.

Commissioner Upchurch stated he supports a public hearing.

Commissioner Cashion questioned a suggested timeline.

Chairman Alston shared that he would like to have a map by the first meeting in October and hold a public hearing in the middle of October. That allows plenty of time to finalize a Map by November 18th.

Commissioner Coleman shared that she hoped that we get a vote of the board as she needs to travel during this window.

Chairman Alston noted what he believes the process will look like.

Payne recommended that we accelerate a public portal and asked that staff be given permission to move forward making that public.

Payne noted that we need to be at a plus or minus 5% between districts.

Chairman Alston reviewed the existing data and areas of noted adjustments. He noted that whatever map is sent to staff should be shared with all for transparency.

Commissioner Coleman questioned the existing maps.

Commissioner Murphy questioned if we could receive more detailed data, such as the precinct data. She asked if we are going to use our current map as a starting point. She also questioned the format that data is sent and asked if they can receive that in not PDF, such as in Excel.

Stephen Dew, GIS Manager, stated he can get data in whatever format needed.

C. REVIEW REDISTRICTING SOFTWARE PLATFORM

Dew gave a brief overview of the software.

Payne discussed the data embedded into the Software.

Dew noted that the site, Dave's Redistricting Software, that is being used was created in 2010 by a voting rights advocate. He noted that when he reviewed the software similar to this, this site has tools that has information built with a local component while others are used to redistrict at the state level.

Commissioner Cooke questioned the credibility of the site.

Commissioner Cashion spoke to the schedule and expediting the process to pre-empt any General Assembly intervention.

Chairman Alston spoke to the history of the last redistricting cycle.

D. DISCUSS COMMUNITY MAP PORTAL

Dew reviewed the functionality of the tool. He offered to do one-on-one tutorials with any commissioner who would like one.

Payne shared that staff will proceed with a public portal and encouraged the Board to adopt guidelines today or at a later meeting and set their next meeting date.

Commissioner Foster in at 4:52PM.

Motion was made by Commissioner Carolyn Q. Coleman and seconded by Commissioner Justin Conrad, to accept the guidelines as presented today.

Commissioner Cooke stated she wouldn't mind more time to review the guidelines to research what other jurisdictions may be doing.

Commissioner Cashion noted that each of the guiding principles notes that it's case law, and we need to be following each one as closely as possible.

Payne stated the Board may want to tweak the language or even add some principles.

Commissioner Cashion asked if these principles are a standard list.

Payne noted that it is a standard list but not a universal list.

Chairman Alston confirmed that we can always amend our guidelines. He noted that we can add to and/or take away from them at any time.

Commissioner Cashion stated that she is comfortable moving forward today if we have the opportunity for additions or deletions later if necessary.

Commissioner Conrad stated that the guidelines are pretty straight forward.

Commissioner Upchurch stated by adopting the guidelines we can officially start the process.

Commissioner Perdue recommended numbering the principles versus bullets to easily reference the list.

Commissioner Cooke clarified her hesitancy is based on her research and if she felt the need to add anything. She would be amenable to passing these guidelines as long as there was an option to add.

Chairman Alston confirmed the Board would have that right.

Motion was made by Commissioner Carolyn Q. Coleman, and seconded by Commissioner Justin Conrad, to accept the guidelines as presented today.

VOTE:	Motion carried 9 - 0
AYES:	Melvin "Skip" Alston, J. Carlvena Foster, Alan Perdue, Justin Conrad, Kay Cashion, Carly Cooke, Mary Beth Murphy, James Upchurch, Carolyn Q. Coleman
NOES:	None

E. REDISTRICTING CALENDAR

Chairman Alston shared that we will try to meet again next week around 4:00PM prior to the board meeting.

Payne suggested next week's meeting being used more as a work session with using the portal and giving feedback to staff.

Commissioner Upchurch asked that we post the portal and the software on our social media sites.

Staff will share the link with the Board and other contact information.

Halford asked if precinct boundaries were set in the software.

Payne stated that it is legal to split precincts, but it is not recommended.

Commissioner Coleman noted that we should discourage that as it is what happened at A&T University and created concern.

Payne reiterated that it is legally permissible, but he does not recommend it moving forward.

Commissioner Coleman recommended that staff prepare 4 or 5 maps for the board to start to work with.

Commissioner Cashion questioned how we would review public responses.

Payne noted that he would support staff providing 4 or 5 working drafts, not proposals, for review.

Commissioner Murphy stated that she would like to provide a preliminary review of the maps, and it would be reasonable for staff to start looking at them to see if they adhere to the guiding principles.

Commissioner Murphy asked for consensus of the board to allow staff to do so.

General consensus of the Board to allow staff to review maps submitted into public portal.

The Board set a work session set for 4:30PM next Thursday, September 16.

The Board discussed the remaining redistricting meeting dates and timeline for approval including having a proposed map by October 7, a public hearing on October 21, with the plan to adopt a final map at the first meeting in November.

Commissioner Murphy clarified that we would be preparing proposed maps, and that would be amendable to presenting two or even three options for public hearing.

There was no additional discussion on redistricting.

Chairman Alston noted that he met with the Mayor's office regarding the ACC. He shared that they are considering voting to move the ACC headquarters out of Guilford County and a request may come to the Board for consideration of an economic incentive.

Commissioner Cooke noted that Piedmont Triad Regional Council is applying for a regional grant for the Build Back Better Program, they are seeking the County's support. We received the request today but the deadline for the grant is the 14th. PTRC will potentially be able to receive \$7 Million grant for the region. She asked if it is ok to give the chairman permission to write a letter of support on behalf of the board.

The Board discussed the ask for a letter of Support.

County Manager Halford discussed the grant details and shared a draft letter of support.

Commissioner Conrad questioned when PTRC was made aware of the grant application and noted that he was concerned that it was a last-minute item.

Commissioner Cooke shared that this is late notice and discussed details of the application. She noted that she was informed that there is no monetary commitment from the county.

Commissioner Coleman noted her understanding of the grant and offered her support.

Commissioner Upchurch clarified that this is just a letter of support.

Motion was made by Commissioner Carly Cooke and seconded by Commissioner James Upchurch to accept the guidelines as presented today.

VOTE:	Motion carried 8 - 1
AYES:	Melvin "Skip" Alston, J. Carlvena Foster, Alan Perdue, Kay Cashion, Carly Cooke, Mary Beth Murphy, James Upchurch, Carolyn Q. Coleman
NOES:	None
ABSTAIN:	Justin Conrad

III. OTHER BUSINESS

A. HOLD CLOSED SESSION PURSUANT TO N.C.G.S. §143-318.11 (6) FOR THE PURPOSE DISCUSSING A PERSONNEL MATTER

Motion was made by Commissioner Alan Perdue and seconded by Commissioner Kay Cashion, to hold closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. §143-318.11 (6) for the purpose discussing a personnel matter.

VOTE:	Motion carried 9 - 0
--------------	-----------------------------

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

NOES: None

The Board recessed the meeting at 5:28PM.

The Board returned from closed session and reconvened the meeting at 6:12PM.

IV. ADJOURN

There being no further business the meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 6:13PM

Melvin "Skip" Alston
Chairman

Robin Keller
Clerk to Board