

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
February 15, 2021 - 5:00 PM  
R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice Womack Building Columbus, NC  
Columbus, NC  
MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Melton, Vice-Chairman Beiler, Commissioner Moore, Commissioner Overholt, and Commissioner Yoder. Also in attendance were County Manager Pittman, Attorney Berg, Clerk to the Board High, and media and citizens. Attorney Berg participated remotely.

1. Call to Order - Chairman Melton.
2. Invocation - Pastor Warren Elliott.
3. Pledge of Allegiance - Commissioner Moore.
4. Chairman and Commissioner Comments.

Chairman Melton thanked everyone for coming out to the meeting. He reiterated the public comment guidelines: sign up before the meeting begins; designate if agenda or non-agenda item comment period; and you will have four minutes to speak. He thanked all the guest speakers for coming to the meeting tonight. Commissioner Yoder thanked everyone for attending the meeting. He said he been hearing several good remarks about the vaccination clinics, and thanked Joshua Kennedy for organizing them.

5. Approval of Agenda

Manager Pittman requested amending the agenda to add Joshua Kennedy to the agenda to discuss the vaccination clinics after Agenda Item 7 *Citizen Comments Agenda Items*.

- A. Commissioner Moore moved to approve the agenda as amended, seconded by Commissioner Yoder and the motion carried unanimously.

6. Consent Agenda

Vice-Chairman Beiler moved to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Commissioner Overholt and the motion carried unanimously.

- A. Approve the February 1, 2021 regular meeting minutes.
- B. Approve the revised 2021 Meeting Schedule January - June.
- C. Adopt the Plat Review Officer Resolution.
- D. Schedule public hearing for new proposed road names for Monday, March 1, 2020 at 5:00 pm in the R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice Womack Building Columbus, NC.

- E. Transportation Title VI Program Plan.
- F. Resolution Declaring Surplus Real Property (P116-123) and Authorizing Sale by Electronic Public Auction.
- G. Vaya Health Quarterly Report ending December 31, 2020.

7. Citizen Comment(s) Agenda Items.

No citizens spoke during the agenda item comment period.

8. Vaccination Clinic Discussion.

Joshua Kennedy, Health and Human Services Agency Director (HHS) gave an update on the vaccination clinics in the county, and said he appreciates the support and positive comments. He said it has been a good team effort of volunteers and staff, including EMS, the Sheriff department, Emergency Management, the School System, Library staff, the HHS Board, Blue Ridge Health, St. Luke's Hospital, and community members. Since December 22, 2020, to date, 2,782 first doses of the vaccine have been given, and 812 second doses.

Mr. Kennedy said this week Polk County will be the distribution center on Thursday, February 18, 2021 to administer 1000 more first doses and 1000 more second doses of the vaccine. He explained the allocation of vaccine doses for this event came from the State, and were made possible because of a letter writing campaign supported by the County Manager, Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC), and other are community partners. Mr. Kennedy said he had also submitted an application designed to reach marginalized communities in Polk, Henderson, Rutherford, and Cleveland counties, all of these things together along with Polk's centralized location made us the ideal distribution point.

Commissioner Moore asked if the other counties have been responsive to him reaching out to organize the event. Mr. Kennedy said he is still working on the details, and is trying to get in touch with some of the other counties.

Commissioner Moore asked Mr. Kennedy to confirm, since the vaccines are part of a federal program, they cannot be limited to just residents of Polk County. Mr. Kennedy said that is correct, however a large percentage of the doses received by Polk County were given to either residents or people who may live outside the county, but work in the county as healthcare professionals or other essential workers.

9. Charter Communications Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Expansion.

Michael Tanck, Director of Government Affairs Charter Communications Inc. said Charter recently participated in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Auction bidding under the name of "CCO Holdings LLC". He explained Phase

one of the reverse auction was conducted by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to make federal funds available to expand broadband service into completely unserved census block areas across the country. On December 7, 2020 the preliminary results were released, but until now there was a "quiet period" and the winners were unable to discuss their awards. Mr. Tanck said Charter is very excited to announce they are one of the largest RDOF recipients in the country. In North Carolina, Charter won RDOF grants in 83 Counties to provide service to over 128,000 locations (addresses) and will be receiving more than \$142 million in Federal Funds. He said it should be noted that for every dollar of federal funds these awards bring back to North Carolina and the local communities, Charter plans to generally invest at least twice as much private funding into these projects.

Mr. Tanck said for Polk County, Charter was awarded 1,350 location (addresses) and \$1,050,622.40 in federal funds. He said there is a Polk County map available that shows the RDOF award areas in green, labeled "CCO Holding, LLC". Manager Pittman said the link to the interactive map will be posted on the County's website. Mr. Tanck said they must have twenty percent completed by the end of the second year, and they have six years to complete the project. He said areas where they have existing relationships with utility companies, and already offer services the expansion should move quicker. He explained there is a large amount of preliminary work involved, but Charter is committed to bringing Broadband to rural communities. Commissioner Yoder asked if they prefer to install overhead or underground. Mr. Tanck said it depends, whichever is the most cost effective. He said as part of the preparation crews will walk every line evaluating existing poles, terrain, etc. to determine which will be best for that area. Vice-Chairman Beiler said this is a fantastic opportunity for Polk County, and asked what speed the service would be. Mr. Tanck said in all the areas of the County where Charter will be expanding broadband service, the standard speed will be 200 Mbps with optional service up to 1 Gigabit.

North Carolina Representative Jake Johnson was in attendance, and Chairman Melton asked him to speak. Rep. Johnson said they had heard about this opportunity coming and he is extremely excited for Polk County, and other rural counties across the state. He said he was recently appointed as Chairman of the Technology Appropriations Committee in the House, and they are going to put a huge emphasis on rural broadband.

He touched on the school funding bill that passed last week requiring an option for in school learning. He said Polk County Schools will receive \$1.7 million to help with this process. Mr. Greene who was also in attendance was given the opportunity to speak. He said Polk County has been able to keep schools open to students since August. He said he appreciates funding support, and hopes it comes with flexibility to be used where it is needed. Manager Pittman said Polk County was one of ten counties across the state able to remain open to in person teaching. Vice-Chairman Beiler commended the legislature for passing this bill as he has noticed in his own family the emotional toll not being in school, even for a short periods of time, can have on children. Rep. Johnson said the need is not only for academic growth, but also for the mental health aspect as well. Commissioner Moore said the Superintendent and entire school system have done a phenomenal job for all they have been through since the pandemic

started. Chairman Melton thanked Rep. Johnson for attending the meeting.

Chairman Melton read the following:

*Polk County Local Government has been active in attempting to close the digital divide within its geographic boundaries over the past fifteen years.*

- *Coordinating and investing in fiber optic cable in the more urban areas of the County with a non-profit provider (PANGAEA) early on in its existence.*
- *Working with existing wireline Providers (Windstream, Riverstreet, PANGAEA, and Charter Communications) to better coordinate opportunities as they arise. Including giving access to vertical assets within our community.*
- *Conducting surveys of citizens, to ensure that resources are targeted in the correct places.*
- *Being a conduit of information between providers and the community.*

*Just like all responses to problems in Polk County, the solution has come from community coordination. These are just a few of the community organizations who has helped with these efforts.*

- *PANGAEA Internet 501(C)3 Non-profit who invested grant dollars to build a network within our County Boundaries and beyond. And who is currently working on ways of filling broadband holes in our community.*
- *State of NC has provided money and resources to help in our digital divide efforts.*
- *Polk County Schools was an early adopter of the fiber optic technology with PANGAEA.*
- *Polk County Government granted money, coordination, and also was an early adopter of fiber optic technology with PANGAEA.*
- *Lake Adger Community (Irene LeCourt) who developed a white paper about the problems with broadband in their community and took on approaching providers for assistance.*
- *All the other citizens who have contacted us about specific problems within their community.*
- *This isn't an exhaustive list, we have accomplished all we have because of community and governing board support.*

*This announcement doesn't mean that our work is over. There will still be holes to fill, even after the significant investment by Charter Communications and Windstream. We will be working with the other providers to help with the void left after the RDOF funding awards. We will be able to better target people who do not have access after the Charter and Windstream build outs.*

10. Isothermal Community College (ICC) Update.

Stephen Matheny, Vice President of Administrative Services at Isothermal Community College (ICC), formally introduced their new President Dr. Margaret Annunziata. Dr. Annunziata addressed the Board, thanking them for their

support, and expressed her appreciation for the Polk County facility. Dr. Annunziata said she looks forward to working with the Commissioners in Polk County, and is honored to serve the college, and the citizens. She said she will be looking for ways to expand offerings, addressing present needs, and then working with industries to tie together the opportunities for citizens. Dr. Annunziata said continuing to expand work force development, and supporting progress and growth is one reason she plans to spend regular, scheduled time at the the Polk Center. She said she wants to get to know the community, and its needs. Mr. Matheny gave a brief update regarding the \$150,000 remodeling project at the Polk Campus. He said \$100,000 was spent on needed repairs and upgrades, and the remaining funds were being used to modify the entrance, transition to the universal keying system used at the main campus, and upgrade the restroom facilities. Mr. Matheny said he anticipates all these projects to be completed Spring 2021. The Board thanked them both for coming to the meeting.

11. Turner Shoal's Dam Update.

David Odom, Engineer gave an update on the dam repair construction project. He said the design and specifications are sixty percent complete, and he anticipates they will be submitted to the State the middle to later part of this year. Mr. Odom explained there will be a six to eight month review period with the State, then we will be able to proceed with the project. He said the estimated cost is just under six million dollars, which has increased since the discussion first began in 2014 due to changes in industry standards and construction costs. He said the County is pursuing grant funding, and has begun the application process. Manager Pittman said he has contacted the offices of Congressman Cawthorn and Senator Tillis requesting consideration for federal appropriations for the project. He said if federal funding is not received, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) financing will be the next option. Mr. Odom said the State will allow a phased project, if necessary to secure funding, as long as progress continues.

12. Waterline Extension Update.

David Odom, Engineer, said they are currently working on two waterline projects. The first is on Pea Ridge Road and the design is almost complete. He said it will then go to permitting and out for bids simultaneously. He explained there will be two phases to the project; first to the fire department substation, then from there to Coxe Road. He said the second project is on Laughter Road, and is in the preliminary stages. He said Inman Campobello Water District has been unable to contact one of the property owners, and they are unable to proceed until this happens.

Chairman Melton asked if drilling a well at the Fire Department Substation on Pea Ridge Road could be an option. Mr. Odom said with the amount of concrete on the site, they would not be able to meet the setback requirements for a well.

Commissioner Yoder asked for confirmation that a hydrant would be placed at the intersection on Coxe Road. Mr. Odom said there would be a hydrant on Coxe Road. Commissioner Yoder said this was very important to the

homeowners in the Green River Highlands Subdivision, as the hydrant can be used to refill fire trucks in emergency situations. Manager Pittman asked how far apart hydrants are typically placed. Mr. Odom said usually they are placed every thousand feet, but it can vary.

13. Polk County High School Maintenance Project.

Aaron Greene, Polk County Schools Superintendent, said the current Polk County High School facility is thirty years old, and is in need of an extensive overhaul of the HVAC system, and other maintenance repairs. He said to build a new high school of comparable enrollment, the average cost would be about fifty-three million dollars. He said the building is structurally sound, and they feel if they these major improvements now, the facility could last another thirty years. Mr. Greene said he is requesting the county work with the school system to receive funding for a HVAC project to make the necessary improvements at the current facility. He said the estimated cost is in excess of six million, and they would use tax revenues committed to school capital improvements to pay the debt set off payments for the loan, if funding is granted. He said the Board of Education supports the project.

Manager Pittman said the County has retained First Tryon Advisors to assist with the process. He said this is the same firm who has helped manage other financing projects for the County. He said after speaking with Mr. Greene, and Mr. Scherping they spoke to the Local Government Commission (LGC) regarding the project. Manager Pittman requested the Board consider scheduling a public hearing and adopting the resolution included in meeting packet.

Commissioner Yoder moved to schedule a public hearing regarding the installment financing agreement to finance maintenance improvements at the Polk County High School on Monday, March 1, 2020 at 5:00 pm in the R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice Womack Building Columbus, NC., seconded by Commissioner Overholt and the motion carried unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Beiler moved to adopt the Resolution calling a public hearing regarding an installment financing agreement to finance school improvements and the acquisition of equipment for a public school and use as security for the County's obligations under the agreement; and declaring the County's intent to reimburse certain expenditures from funds borrowed under the agreement, seconded by Commissioner Yoder and the motion carried unanimously.

14. Budget amendment to appropriate fund balance for capital project, and amend Project Ordinance to increase project for countywide radio communication system.

Manager Pittman said this is phase two of a radio communication project the county began last year. He explained it was specifically left out of the budget because of the uncertainty of COVID-19. He said the county has evaluated revenues, and is able to fund phase two of the project. He said this new system will interconnect Polk County with Henderson County. Manager Pittman said the new radio system will improve communication throughout the county for emergency personnel and the citizens, and is intended to help fill in voids where

there are currently dead zones. Sheriff Wright was present and said an updated radio communication system has been needed for a long time in the county, and the connectivity with Henderson County will help improve coverage throughout the Polk County. Representatives from Mills River in Henderson County who use the current system were also present and said they look forward to the improved radio communications and believe it will be beneficial for everyone involved. Manager Pittman said to make the systems connect we need to use the same system Henderson County uses. We were able to use Kimball as a sole source vendor since they are part of the State Contract. Commissioner Yoder asked if the communication towers already exist. Manager Pittman said yes, all the "bones" of the system are existing this will be to upgrade the main electronic equipment of the system, and add generators. Commissioner Moore moved to approve the budget amendment to appropriate \$659,966 to the capital project fund for the countywide radio communication project, seconded by Vice-Chairman Beiler and the motion carried unanimously. Vice-Chairman Beiler moved to approve the amended Project Ordinance increasing the amount to \$861,476 (adding \$659,966 to the project for expansion of countywide radio communication project), seconded by Commissioner Overholt and the motion carried unanimously.

15. Budget Calendar for fiscal year 2021/2022 - Sandra Hughes, Finance Director.

Sandra Hughes, Finance Director presented the fiscal year 2021/2022 budget calendar. She said it was drafted for a revaluation year to allow the maximum amount of time to get a revenue neutral tax base calculation for the manager's budget. Manager Pittman said the calendar gives him the opportunity to gather the tax data needed to implement a revenue neutral tax rate into the budget he will present. The consensus of the Board was for a revenue neutral tax rate, and the fire rate to stay revenue neutral.

Commissioner Moore moved to approve the FY 2021/2022 budget calendar as presented, seconded by Vice-Chairman Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

16. Volunteer Board Application(s) - the review period was waived to seat members before budget, and appeal hearings begin for their boards and commissions.

- A. Application for vote - 1 application for the Columbus Fire Tax Commission Sam Patel; 4 applications for the Equalization and Review Board Joshua Collier, Brian Metcalf, Adrienne Reilly; Tonya Walls; and 4 applications for the Fire and Rescue Advisory Commission Jeremy Gregg, Anthony Hamilton, Brian Metcalf, Derrick Overholt.

Vice-Chairman Beiler moved to appoint all the volunteer board applicants as stated, seconded by Commissioner Yoder and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Melton said they must now appoint a Chairman to the Equalization and Review Board from on of the sitting members.

Commissioner Moore moved to appoint Brian Metcalf as Chairman to the Equalization and Review Board, seconded by Vice-Chairman Beiler and the motion carried unanimously.

17. Citizen Comment(s) Non-Agenda Items.

One citizen spoke during the non-agenda item comment period.

18. Adjournment

Commissioner Moore moved to to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Yoder and the motion carried unanimously.

Attest:

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF  
COMMISSIONERS

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Ange High  
Clerk to the Board

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Tommy W. Melton  
Chairman