

POLK COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' PUBLIC HEARING &  
REGULAR MEETING

Monday, February 6, 2012 at 7:00pm

R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice, Womack Building

Columbus, NC

MINUTES

PRESENT: Chair Gasperson, Vice-Chair McDermott, Commissioner Owens, Commissioner Pack and Commissioner Walker. Also in attendance were County Manager Whitson, County Attorney Egan, Clerk to the Board Fehrmann, staff, media and citizens.

1. Call to Order of the Community Development Block Grant Program Public Hearing – Chair Gasperson called the public hearing to order. The purpose of the hearing was to hear public comment and discuss funds available through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, especially the Small Business & Entrepreneurial Assistance (SBEA) Grant Program. CDBG and SBEA funds are provided to the State by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and are administered at the State level by the NC Department of Commerce through Community Investment & Assistance. Paula Kempton, Grant Services Assistant Manager, was present to answer questions. The block grant guidelines are on file with these minutes.
2. Citizen Comments – There were no citizen comments.
3. Commissioner Comments – There were no Commissioner comments.
4. Motion to Adjourn the Public Hearing – Commissioner Owens moved to adjourn the public hearing, seconded by Commissioner Walker and the motion carried unanimously.
5. Call to Order of the Regular Board of Commissioners' Meeting – Chair Gasperson called the regular meeting to order.
6. Invocation – Commissioner Owens gave the invocation.
7. Pledge of Allegiance – Commissioner Pack led the pledge.
8. Approval of Minutes – Commissioner Walker moved to approve the January 23, 2012, public hearing, regular BOC, and work session meeting minutes, seconded by Vice-Chair McDermott and the motion carried unanimously.
9. Approval of Agenda – County Manager Whitson requested that the CooperRiis waterline extension be added to Agenda Item #15. Commissioner Owens moved

- to approve the agenda as amended, seconded by Vice-Chair McDermott and the motion carried unanimously.
10. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program – Commissioner Owens moved to schedule a second CDBG Program public hearing for February 20, 2012, at 3:00pm in the R. Jay Foster Hall of Justice, Womack Building, seconded by Commissioner Pack and the motion carried unanimously.
  11. American Reinvestment & Recovery Act (ARRA) Camera System Project for Polk County Transportation Authority (PCTA) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – Jewell Carswell, Director, gave the presentation. The information is on file with these minutes. Vice-Chair McDermott moved to approve the Vehicle Camera and Software Project Memorandum of Understanding, seconded by Commissioner Walker and the motion carried unanimously.
  12. January Refund Request – Melissa Bowlin, Tax Collector, presented the request. Commissioner Owens moved to approve the January Refund Request, seconded by Commissioner Pack and the motion carried unanimously.
  13. Delinquent Taxes – Ms. Bowlin reported that six volunteer board members have delinquent taxes. The Board instructed County Manager Whitson to include a letter with the tax collection department's April delinquent tax notices requesting that those members become current on their taxes and warning that taxes must be current to continue membership on a volunteer board. This letter is to be signed by Chair Gasperson.
  14. Budget Amendment – Commissioner Owens moved to approve BA #11 to increase revenue and expense for additional money from the Division of Aging on our Home and Community Care Block Grant to be expended on food at the Senior Center, seconded by Vice-Chair McDermott and the motion carried unanimously.
  15. Hwy. 108 Polk County-Columbus Waterline Interconnection – Dave Odom, County Engineer, presented the bids. The information is on file with these minutes. Vice-Chair McDermott moved to award the bid for \$592,465 to Steppe Construction of Mill Spring, contingent upon permit approval by the State, to build the interconnection, seconded by Commissioner Owens.

Citizen comments – Ricky McFalls said that during the last budget process everybody wanted to “cut to the bone”, but now the County wants to spend money; where did the County get all this extra money for the waterline extension, and to pay off the Senior Center loan?

Commissioner Pack stated that he is one of the biggest proponents of laying water lines in the County. However, during budget time the County did not have money to do some of the things it should have done for the citizens and county

employees. For this reason he is going to vote against this waterline extension – not that he does not want to see the waterlines put in, but the County needs to take care of other business first.

With a motion and a second on the floor the motion carried 4-1 (Pack opposed).

County Manager Whitson told the Board that he has spoken with representatives from CooperRiis regarding a possible waterline extension to their facility in Mill Spring. Jeff Byrd, CooperRiis Managing Director, said three new staff houses are about to be constructed and, instead of drilling new wells, CooperRiis would possibly be interested in public water. Dave Odom reported that the cost of the waterline extension would be \$65,954. Mr. Byrd said their engineer is currently working on the cost of drilling wells versus bringing in public water, and he will let the County know by the end of March or the beginning of April whether or not CooperRiis wants to pursue public water.

Commissioner Pack asked County Manager Whitson if this project would fall under the County's Waterline Extension Policy, and Mr. Whitson said it depends on how you look at it since it is part of a trunk line. County Manager Whitson recommended that the County put the waterline in as long as CooperRiis signs an agreement to become a customer, and said that it could be paid for out of the County's waterline extension fund. Commissioner Pack said Sandy Plains was a trunk line but fell under the waterline extension policy. County Manager Whitson said the trunk lines have not been well defined by the County; he considers the trunk lines to be Hwy. 9 and Hwy. 108.

Commissioner Walker asked if CooperRiis would be interested in helping with the cost of the waterline extension, or are they just asking the County to run the line? Jeff Byrd said cost sharing has not been discussed, but he could ask the principals. County Manager Whitson said this would be some of the best money the County has spent on economic development since CooperRiis has approximately seventy-five employees, is building three new houses, plans to possibly build nine more houses in the future, and would become a large water customer. Commissioner Owens said the County needs to define its trunk line(s).

Commissioner Pack said if this waterline extension is to fall under economic development, then the County Manager needs to determine how much in revenues CooperRiis brings into the County. Vice-Chair McDermott asked if CooperRiis served any Polk County clients, and Mr. Byrd said that while they have served Polk County clients they, unlike Pavilion, do not have beds reserved specifically for local clients in financial need. Commissioner Pack asked that the ETDC get involved with this project and give their recommendation to the BOC. County Manager Whitson said CooperRiis is non-profit and pays no County taxes. Mr. Byrd said CooperRiis' payroll is approximately \$6 million. Commissioner Pack asked that those numbers be given to the Economic Development Director.

16. Polk County Water Department/Columbus Interconnect Agreement – Commissioner Owens moved to authorize Chair Gasperson to sign the agreement, contingent upon approval by the Columbus Town Council at their February 16, 2012, regular meeting, seconded by Vice-Chair McDermott and the motion carried unanimously.
17. Amendment to Agreement to Construct Water Transmission Line and Provide for the Sale of Finished Water – Commissioner Owens verified that Inman-Campobello Water District cannot lay any waterlines off of the main trunk line(s) in Polk County without permission from the County. Vice-Chair McDermott moved to authorize County Manager Whitson to sign the amendment to agreement with Inman-Campobello Water District to construct water transmission line and provide for the sale of finished water, seconded by Commissioner Walker and the motion carried unanimously.
18. Future County Water System – Dave Odom gave the presentation. The information is on file with these minutes. Commissioner Pack said that the County is putting the Polk County 20/20 Vision Plan's Phase II ahead of Phase I. Vice-Chair McDermott said that, depending on the current circumstances, sometimes it is reasonable and prudent to deviate from an original plan. Mr. Odom was instructed to conduct a survey to determine how many residents on Hwy. 9 would be interested in public water were it made available. Mr. Odom was also instructed to generate a three-phase plan for the Hwy. 9 waterline extension, and to include cost estimates for each phase, and report back to the Board.
19. Senior Center Loan Payoff – The information is on file with these minutes. Commissioner Owens asked that this item be tabled in order for the Board to hear from Mr. Odom and to consider its options regarding the possible Hwy. 9 waterline extension. Commissioner Owens said the County cannot borrow money for the waterline extension and the Senior Center loan is a low interest loan. Commissioner Owens said his request is based on the fact that, if the County connects Hwy. 9 and Hwy. 108, then the area will be connected all the way from Asheville to Charlotte, thereby creating a regional water supply. Commissioner Owens said that with a regional water supply in place the Federal and State government cannot dictate what the County can or cannot do in case a drought occurs.

Commissioner Walker said she would like to pay off the Senior Center loan in order to save \$316,307.29 in interest. County Manager Whitson said that if this loan is paid off, then the County would have approximately \$11.5 million in debt - down from approximately \$23 million five years ago – and a 20% fund balance. Chair Gasperson said the County has not had to consider any tax increases in the last three years due to the fact that the County's debt has been dramatically reduced in the last three years. Chair Gasperson went on to say that this fiscal year a loan payoff enabled the County to give the school system an additional \$400,000; if the

County pays the Senior Center loan off, then the savings will pay for the 2.5 percent employee salary increase, and this increase will be sustainable.

Commissioner Pack said the County has spent a lot of money paying off debt, and that money could have been shared with County employees who have not had a raise in four years, and with citizens through lower taxes, and the County still could have paid off some debt – the debt was all planned and sustainable. Vice-Chair McDermott said that by paying off loans over the past three years, money that had gone to debt service has been freed up for other projects. Vice-Chair McDermott went on to say that, after paying off the Senior Center loan, the County would still have approximately \$11.5 million in debt, and this is not the time to give a tax break, especially since it is likely that Federal and State revenues will be taken away from the County. Vice-Chair McDermott said, in light of this, even if the County lowered taxes, it would have to turn right around and raise them again.

Commissioner Pack said the County's fund balance has grown every year. Commissioner Pack said last year the County paid off \$2 million in debt and this year it will spend approximately \$ 1.9 million; the County is in good financial shape and should not continue to overtax the citizens, or cut employees' benefits and wait four years to give them a raise.

It was the consensus of the Board to table this item until the March 5, 2012, regular meeting.

20. Manager's Report – County Manager Whitson was instructed to attend the NC-SC boundary survey meeting in Rock Hill, SC, on February 14, 2012.
21. Volunteer Board for Vote – Annelie Baer, Cathy Brettman and Ernie Kan were appointed to the Appearance Commission by unanimous vote; Christy Beddingfield was appointed to the Council on Aging by unanimous vote; David Slater was appointed to the Farmland Preservation Board by unanimous vote.
22. Volunteer Board for Review – Applications for the Library Board of Trustees and Juvenile Crime Prevention Council were reviewed.
23. Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items – Ricky McFalls said financially the County has ridden on the employees' backs because the money to pay for the waterline and to pay off the Senior Center loan is in the fund balance because county employees have not had a raise in four years and their insurance costs have increased; the employees are the ones who should be thanked.
24. Commissioner Comments – The Commissioners thanked everyone for coming out.
25. Adjournment – Commissioner Walker moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Owens and the motion carried unanimously.

ATTEST:

POLK COUNTY BOARD  
OF COMMISSIONERS

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Beth Fehrmann  
Clerk to the Board

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Ray Gasperson  
Chair