

**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
CONTINUED SESSION
APRIL 25, 2017
MINUTES**

Chairman Tate reconvened the meeting at 6:03 p.m. as recessed from the April 11, 2017 regular meeting. The meeting was held, as noticed, in the Entegra Bank Boardroom of the Cecil L. Groves Center on the Macon campus of Southwestern Community College (SCC) at 44 Siler Farm Road in Franklin, NC. All board members, the County Manager, Deputy Clerk and County Attorney were present, as were members of the news media.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to hold a joint meeting with the SCC Board of Trustees, and to discuss any other business before the board, and a number of items were addressed prior to the joint meeting.

The County Manager handed out copies of a draft letter of support regarding a pilot program to serve veterans and their families. He said the county has been selected to participate in the NC Serves program that would be coordinated by Vaya Health, and that no county funding will be required. However, the grant application is due April 28th. Chairman Tate pointed out that the new program would serve almost 10 percent of the county's overall population. Following further discussion, and upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Gillespie, the board voted unanimously to approve the letter of support as presented, a copy of which is attached **(Attachment 1)** and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

The County Manager noted that he would be in Raleigh on May 9th, the date of the board's next regular meeting. He pointed out that Commissioner Beale would also be in Raleigh May 8-11. He asked to reschedule his presentation of the recommended Fiscal Year 2017-18 budget to May 16th at 6 p.m., and the board agreed to the change by consensus.

Commissioner Shields raised questions about a potential merger of Essential Systems Engineering, a Georgia-based firm, and McGill Associates of Asheville. Following brief discussion, the County Attorney said he would investigate the matter further.

Following a request from the Deputy Clerk, and upon a motion by Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Beale, the board voted unanimously to ratify an April 17, 2017 e-mail poll of the board regarding a new but temporary position to be created within the Board of Elections staff. A copy of that e-mail is attached (Attachment 2) and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Higdon, Chairman Tate declared a five-minute recess at 6:15 p.m. in order for the board members to move to Room 111 in the Groves Center to meet with the SCC Board of Trustees.

Chairman Tate reconvened the meeting at 6:20 p.m. in Room 111, where the Finance Director joined the meeting.

Chairman Tate asked for time for the county to address one item of business prior to starting the joint meeting. He referred to “bad news” received from Mission Hospital earlier in the day that Angel Medical Center would no longer provide labor and delivery services for expectant mothers as of July 14th. He said he was unsure what this means for the community, but it was not good long term. Chairman Tate said the announcement “caught a lot of people off guard” and as elected officials, “It’s not our fault, but now it’s our problem.” He went on to state, “I was completely blindsided by this topic, by this issue, and it sure would have been nice to have known beforehand that this conversation was even happening, because I had no clue.” He added that he had shared his “extreme disappointment” with hospital officials. Economic Development Director Tommy Jenkins said he was “blindsided like everyone else” by the announcement. No action was taken.

With no other county business, Dr. Don Tomas, the president of SCC, welcomed the commissioners on behalf of the college and explained that one of the main reasons for the meeting was to have an “open conversation” about the master plan for the Macon campus, particularly the fire training rescue facility. He added that Curtis Dowdle, the dean of SCC’s Public Safety Training, had a PowerPoint presentation regarding options for a new “burn building.” He then introduced the members of the Board of Trustees and the college staff members that were present, following by Chairman Tate’s introductions of the county commissioners and staff.

Mr. Dowdle started his presentation by pointing out that the existing burn building is 32 years old, and is the oldest burn building within the state still in active use. It is the only three-level building west of Buncombe County, but is located in a designated flood plain and has been prone to flooding an average of

four times a year. He also noted that in February of 2015, engineers recommended replacing the building over the next two years, and in October of that year the NC Office of the State Fire Marshall recommended moving the building out of the flood plain to avoid further degrading of the structure. In August of 2016, another engineering firm reported that the building was approaching the end of its service life and should be replaced. He said that 115 classes involving 2,076 students were held at the building during 2016. He then outlined the accreditation standards required for a burn building, as well as the needs for training not only firefighters but law enforcement and emergency medical personnel. Following a discussion of two possible sites for the new structure on county land near the Macon campus, Mr. Dowdle then reviewed three options to replace the current building. The costs range from a low of \$1,778,629 to \$3,164,000, with the last figure representing the cost of building a structure similar to the new one at Haywood Community College. The annual estimated recurring cost of maintaining and staffing the facility was set at \$81,000. Mr. Dowdle pointed out that the total cost of the Haywood facility came in at just over \$5 million. He said that school officials anticipate an increase of approximately six percent in the construction cost annually, along with an assumption of the design fee coming in at eight to nine percent of the overall cost. This led to a lengthy discussion among many participants about the sites, options and costs, where the funding would come from, and the possibility of a mitigation plan where additional funds might become available from the current building and land. Although \$1,425,000 is “set aside” from NC Connect bond funds for the building, it will require a county obligation of \$485,000 to \$500,000. While the value of the county property for the facility can be applied to the project, it still comes up short in terms of “real money.” Commissioner Beale raised the issue of half of those using the burn building being residents of other counties, yet Macon taxpayers pick up the cost of helping provide the facility. Dr. Tomas pointed to the dollars paid by those in training for food, fuel and overnight stays in the county. Commissioner Shields stressed that county and SCC officials should not miss out on this opportunity, as this is really about an educational program, not just a building. After more discussion, Chairman Tate recommended that the commissioners take this matter up during their upcoming budget discussions, stating that it is “a worthwhile project.” Following additional discussion, no action was taken.

At 7:36 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.

Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

Jim Tate
Board Chairman