

**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
CONTINUED SESSION
JUNE 8, 2017
MINUTES**

Chairman Tate reconvened the meeting at 5:03 p.m. in the commission boardroom as recessed from the May 16, 2017 continued session and welcomed those in attendance. All board members, the County Manager, Deputy Clerk, Finance Director, County Attorney, members of the news media and interested citizens were present. Chairman Tate announced that the “gist of tonight’s meeting has to do with budget and budget discussions,” adding his perspective that this work is “the most important thing this board is elected to do.”

ADDITIONS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to approve the agenda as amended by adding discussion of a Health Department budget item as #8 and adding discussion of a Macon County Public Library budget item as #4.

MACON COUNTY SCHOOLS: Macon County Schools Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin presented a PowerPoint presentation that began by providing a budget history comparing Macon County and Macon County Schools dating back to the 2008-09 fiscal/school year. He emphasized that the county budget went up 7.8 percent from 2008 to 2017 while the school system’s budget went down 12 percent during that same time. He also pointed to a decrease in the current expense allocation that comes to the schools from the county. He said Macon has the largest Average Daily Membership (ADM) at 4,387 students among counties of similar size (Jackson, Transylvania and Watauga) in the region. Dr. Baldwin then reviewed the system’s draft budget and reviewed the impact on the system as to whether the state House or state Senate version of the budget is adopted, noting the House version is much more favorable. He went on to use a statement by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) to the Committee for the Study of Public Finance which stated that in 2016, North Carolina counties on average funded 21.4 percent of school system operational expenditures while Macon funds 16.9 percent of those expenses. He voiced his opinion that while he doesn’t dispute that the state should be funding more or all of these expenses, he asked the board to consider maintaining the current operational budget by adding

\$200,000 in additional funding. The subject then turned to the system's capital outlay budget, which led to a discussion about South Macon Elementary School being at capacity and the need for expansion. The County Manager responded with some comments, noting that it seems like every year that the uncertainty of the state budget leaves both the county and the school system "in limbo." This led to an exchange of statistical information between Dr. Baldwin and the County Manager, and members of the board joined in the discussion as it progressed. Macon County Board of Education Chairman Jim Breedlove told the commissioners that the school system representatives "don't want just a minimal experience" for their students, adding that the system needs the additional \$200,000. He added that although the way schools are funded is sometimes confusing, "our books are open." Fred Goldsmith, a member of the school board, also implored the commissioners to consider the increased funding. Following approximately one hour of discussion, no action was taken.

FRANKLIN FIRE DEPARTMENT: Franklin Fire Chief Kevin Rohrer and Town Manager Summer Woodard presented the fire department's request for a one-cent tax increase, which would move the department's rate from 4.45 cents to 5.45 cents per \$100 valuation. The increase would be used to fund a change in staffing by moving a current 12-hour firefighter position to a 24-hour position, and allow the department to build its capital outlay to replace vehicles. Chief Rohrer noted that the department's call volume has increased to more than 2,000 calls per year, and that he is looking to increase manpower during night hours due to a lack of volunteers. He also noted that about 500 of those calls came in after 9 p.m. The discussion then turned to the need to replace vehicles. Ms. Woodard said the department still owes about \$1.5 million on two vehicles that will be paid off in 2020. Chief Rohrer said that with seven in the fleet, the department needs to be replacing a vehicle every three years. Commissioner Higdon stated that the requests from all of the county's fire departments need consistency and asked what the Town of Franklin contributed. Commissioner Higdon pointed out that the requested increase amounts to a 20 percent hike in the rate. Following further questions and discussion, no action was taken.

BURNINGTOWN/IOTLA VOLUNTEER FIRE & RESCUE: Burningtown/Iotla Fire Chief Kenneth McCaskill outlined the department's requested increase from 8.67 cents to 10.46 cents per \$100 valuation. Chief McCaskill listed the department's goals and explained that calls were up over the previous year. He said the increase would allow the full operation of the department's substation, which in turn would allow for a better insurance rating. Much of the following discussion centered on the new substation, which was built at a cost of approximately \$550,000 and, per Chief McCaskill, is scheduled for final inspection on June 9th. Commissioner Higdon pointed out that the department

was seeking an approximately 21 percent increase in the tax rate and that was “a pretty big hit for one year.” He stated that he couldn’t vote for a 20 percent increase in one year for anything, including the request from Franklin earlier in the meeting. After further discussion, no action was taken.

Prior to the break, Macon County Emergency Services Director Warren Cabe told the board that while education is important, he asked the commissioners to remember that public safety is a top priority of the county and accounts for 27 percent of the annual budget.

Chairman Tate called a recess at 6:59 p.m.

Chairman Tate called the meeting back to order to 7:12 p.m.

ADDITIONAL BUDGET DISCUSSION: Lenny Jordan, the chairman of the Macon County Public Library Board of Trustees, told the board that 13 of the library’s employees make less than \$11 per hour and that is “hard to live on.” He said the library board is asking for a 50-cent per hour raise for their employees, and that funding is also needed to replace aging computers. He said the library hasn’t seen an increase in its overall allocation from the county in the last four years and this could be the fifth. “Please look at what we are asking,” he told the commissioners. From there the discussion centered on salary and benefit issues as well as the leaky roof on the library at Nantahala. No action was taken. Chairman Tate, as the liaison to the Macon County Board of Health, explained that the health board members want an additional maintenance worker at the public health center to focus on cleaning the clinical areas. This led to a discussion about training an existing employee to do this work or possibly contracting for it, and the need for additional cleaning help at the animal shelter. No action was taken. The County Manager reminded the board that the public hearing on the budget will be held June 13th and that the members typically have given him guidance on where they wish for him to make adjustments prior to that hearing. Following discussion, the board agreed to hold another budget work session on Monday, June 12th beginning at 6 p.m. in the boardroom.

REAPPOINTMENT OF TAX ADMINISTRATOR: Tax Administrator Richard Lightner told the board that his current appointment would expire on July 1, 2017 and that he was seeking to be reappointed to another four-year term. A copy of Mr. Lightner’s letter to the board is attached **(Attachment 1)** and is hereby made a part of these minutes. With a collection rate of 98.18 percent in 2015-16, he said the county moved from 48th to 38th among the state’s 100 counties in terms of the collection rate. The next property reassessment is set for 2019 and he added that his department will soon be forced to evaluate and update its computer software. He told the board there are “lots of big things coming up” and added, “I’d like to still be here.” Upon a motion by

Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to reappoint Mr. Lighter to a four-year term as Tax Administrator as requested.

BUDGET AMENDMENTS: The Finance Director asked for approval of three budget amendments, #211, #212 and #213, all of which involve the Health Department and involve funds to pay for June 2017 expenses. Upon a motion by Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Gillespie, the board voted unanimously to approve the budget amendments as presented, copies of which are attached (Attachments 2-4) and are hereby made a part of these minutes.

NC WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AMENDMENT 1: The Finance Director explained the changes needed for a Fiscal Year 2017 Weatherization Assistance Program and Heating and Air Repair and Replacement Program. Essentially, the amendment adjusts the award amount from \$171,357 to \$105,210. Upon a motion by Commissioner Gillespie, seconded by Commissioner Beale, the board voted unanimously to approve the amendment as presented, a copy of which is attached (Attachment 5) and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

RECESS: Following discussion on the broadband allocation in the proposed county budget and the status of negotiations with Southwestern Community College regarding the new burn building, at 8:13 p.m. and upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to recess the meeting until Monday, June 12, 2017 at 6 p.m. in the commission boardroom on the third floor of the Macon County Courthouse, 5 West Main Street, Franklin, NC.

Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

Jim Tate
Board Chairman