

**GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
NOVEMBER 16, 2015**

The Gates County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session at 7:00 p.m. Monday, November 16, 2015 in the Gates County Court House, 202 Court Street, Gatesville. Commissioners Hofler, Owens, Jordan, Felton and Freeman were present. Also present was County Manager, Natalie Rountree.

Commissioner Jordan led in prayer and the pledge of allegiance.

Chairman Hofler called the meeting to order.

**Approval of Minutes**

Minutes are approved during the first meeting of the month.

**Approval of Agenda**

Chair Hofler stated the personnel board recommendations and planning board appointments will be moved to closed session instead of under new business. We will add a request for support of a Gatesville cell tower under new business.

Commissioner Owens made a motion to approve the agenda as adjusted. Commissioner Felton seconded the motion; motion passed without opposition.

**Delegations – Unannounced**

None

**Delegations – Announced**

Bill Samler, NOAA's National Weather Service, stated the County has been recognized as one of four counties in northeastern NC that is considered storm ready. Storm Ready is a program that was developed in 2000 after a flood killed a number of people and opened up eyes to communication inefficiencies between localities and the weather service. Storm Ready recognizes localities that meet a set of very specific guidelines. As part of the recognition the County receives a small plaque as well as a Storm Ready sign that may be placed anywhere in the County.

**Administrative Reports**

Administrative reports are given during the first meeting of the month.

**Public Hearings**

None

**Old Business**

Ms. Rountree stated Jon Zellweger from Clearscapes was not able to attend the meeting but submitted a letter explaining they understand the renovations have been a long process and he has received the information from Shelly Sass and her recommendations. Ms. Rountree read the last two paragraphs of the letter:

At this time, we understand the County continues to struggle with the aspiration to save the West Wing while being concerned with the realities of time and mounting costs. In consulting with the State Historic Preservation Office, we do not believe you will be impacting the building's listing on the National Register nor any potential future tax-credit or grant opportunities should you choose to reconstruct the wing entirely. This is because you have invested so meaningfully in possible solutions to save the Wing.

In previous conference calls with you and Ms. Rountree, we discussed the value in doing further materials testing- throughout the building not just in the West Wing- to feel confident that there are no additional hidden problems. We recommend you enter into an agreement with WJE Associates that can address the building

holistically. We feel that this is one more investment that the County should consider before adopting a reconstruction approach for the West Wing. With so many years struggling to hold on to what our community has enjoyed and been inspired by for 180 years, we believe it is in your best interest to take a bit more time and gather this additional information. We believe it can give you the greatest possible confidence in any final decision you choose to make.

Ms. Rountree stated WJE provided an estimate of \$5,800 to do the additional testing.

James Andrus, Andrus Co., stated he has received the WJE correspondence and is available to answer any questions the Board may have. Chair Hofler asked Mr. Andrus in his opinion if the testing is needed before a decision is made. Mr. Andrus feels some testing would be beneficial to determine what is causing the problem so that if the wall is rebuilt you can prevent the issues from occurring again but it doesn't appear that the current estimate from WJE includes all of the testing. It appears to be more of an opinion.

Commissioner Owens feels there has been a great deal of review on the building and the facility. Commissioner Owens reference how low the building is built to the ground and stated if the contractor was able to get under the building they would be able to tell a whole lot about the structure of the building.

Mr. Andrus explained the testing will check the brick, mortar and stucco. The way the building is constructed pockets have been created in the masonry to hold the wood frame.

Commissioner Jordan stated some of the testing is to determine the mortar and structural integrity of the existing mortar and cement to uphold the load. Mr. Andrus stated some of the bricks have no mortar in between the bricks and where there is mortar it has turned into almost powder and can be pulled out with your fingers. It appears all of the information has not been considered and reviewed.

Commissioner Jordan is concerned if the architect has recommended the additional testing we need to be hesitant about going against their recommendation. The architect is the one that is going to develop the plans and determine how the construction will take place.

Commissioner Owens stated he is under the opinion that the west wing needs to be replaced, we don't want anything that is going to be unsafe or need patchwork in the future. There is concern that the east wing may show some of the same conditions. Commissioner Owens stated testing means big dollars that doesn't replace anything where as a carpenter will go under a building and determine things needs to be fixed.

Mr. Andrus explained a combination of things are needed. For the west wing the cheapest thing to do is going to be to rebuild it but testing other areas throughout the building will be useful and will help to determine a long term plan to deal with deficiencies. Some additional information to determine for sure if it is or is not rotting from inside.

Commissioner Felton asked Mr. Andrus if he feels enough testing has been completed. Mr. Andrus isn't aware of any testing that has been conducted to determine what is going on inside of the wall. Commissioner Felton feels everyone seems to know what needs to be done but we keep dancing around it.

Commissioner Jordan is concerned that we may be reconstructing a wing that will be attaching into a building that is not capable to handle the load of the new construction. Mr. Andrus stated the existing wing is currently a standalone structure that butts up to the main portion of the building. If a new wing was constructed it would depend on how the wing is constructed before you will know if it will be joined to the main building. Commissioner Jordan reiterated that Clearscapes will be designing the construction of the wall. Mr. Andrus stated he cannot make any design recommendations because the permit has been pulled by Clearscapes. Commissioner Jordan feels by disregarding Clearscapes recommendation we need them to provide us with an alternative as they are the ones that will be drawing the designs.

Chair Hofler asked Mr. Andrus if the Board should draft a letter to WJE to go through the documentation that has been provided and then review the building.

Mr. Andrus explained the side walls are much more stable than they were a year ago and there is a combination of things that could be considered that are doable but they may not be cost effective. Mr. Andrus' concern is that the County will continue to see issues down the road from other sections of the building

Commissioner Owens made a motion to contact WJE and confirm the services that will be received for \$5,800, identify the cost of travel expenses, where they are traveling from and secure a time frame. Commissioner Freeman seconded the motion; the Board opened for discussion.

Commissioner Felton stated the WJE letter already mentions a phase II that will occur and it would be nice to know a potential cost for phase II.

Commissioner Felton asked Mr. Andrus if Clearscapes called him tomorrow and wanted him to start construction if he would feel comfortable starting the construction. Mr. Andrus stated it would depend on how the scope of the construction was written. If it was to rebuild the wall and had the appropriate plans Mr. Andrus would feel fine starting construction.

Commissioner Felton confirmed the motion is to only inquire about information, not to proceed into a contract with WJE.

Mr. Andrus reiterated the biggest thing is to determine what needs to be done in the future. The County needs to be aware of what is occurring on the east wing and the front of the building.

Chair Hofler restated the motion to contact WJE and confirm the services that will be received for \$5,800, identify the cost of travel expenses, where they are traveling from and secure a time frame. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **New Business**

Perry Eure, stated he is speaking on behalf on a lady that the Hall Ruritan club and the Eure Women's Club have helped over the years. In the past she has received some funds to help her pay bills and recently she has contacted them in regards to a tax bill for land that she said they have never owned but her husband always felt they owned the land and was insistent of paying the taxes. He has passed away and she would like to quit paying for land that is not on the records as something she owns. There is no legal documentation that she actually owns the land. Since 1977 she has paid roughly \$2,000 in taxes. In 1933 the land was sold to Union Camp and they have been paying the tax all of these years also. The Tax Administrator and the Register of Deeds both agree that there is no legal documentation stating she owns the land.

Kathy Lane, stated a refund can only be given for the past five years and Mr. Eure is correct that the Tax Office and the Register of Deeds can not find any legal documentation that the land is owned by Ms. Umphlett.

Commissioner Freeman stated based on all of the information provided it is very obvious that she has been paying taxes on land she doesn't own and someone else has also been paying the taxes.

Commissioner Felton made a motion to grant Shirley Umphlett a tax refund in the amount of \$310.08. Commissioner Freeman seconded the motion; motion passed without opposition.

Commissioner Jordan asked that the general stature showing the County is able to make the refund be referenced on the refund.

Chair Hofler stated Ms. Pittman, Finance Director, has requested a Deputy Finance Officer be appointed.

Ms. Pittman stated when the finance officer is out of the office things get delayed because there is no one available to handle preaudit certifications and such. Ms. Rountree has the education, background, and knowledge to be able to review financial information and make

decisions. In the past a county manager has been made as a deputy for a temporary time. Most counties either have a deputy finance officer or have this appointment in place.

Commissioner Owens made a motion to appoint Natalie Rountree as the Deputy Finance Officer. Commissioner Jordan seconded the motion; motion passed unanimously.

Chair Hofler stated Senator Cook will be making a trip to Gates County and would like to meet with the Board of Commissioners on December 11th after 2pm because he will be at the Aging and Adult Task Force meeting during the morning.

The Board agreed to meet with Senator Cook on December 11<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. at the Millpond.

Bessie Eure has an agreement for a cell tower but has requested a letter of support encouraging the company to start with the construction soon due to a need in the county.

Commissioner Owens stated he is in favor of the letter because there is a need. Ms. Rountree stated they have submitted plans that will be reviewed by the Planning Board at the December meeting.

Commissioner Owens stated if we have cell towers in place and they have building permits is it required for them to go to the Planning Board. Chair Hofler stated they are required to secure a lot of information to meet the Utility Commission requirements.

Commissioner Jordan made a motion to direct the County Manager to draft a letter of support for the construction of the cell tower due to a need. Commissioner Felton seconded the motion; motion passed without opposition.

Commissioner Owens requested a copy of the letter be sent to Ms. Eure.

#### **Citizen Comments**

None

#### **Commissioner Comments**

Commissioner Freeman thanked citizens for their attendance and Mr. Eure for helping out a fellow citizen. Commissioner Freeman reiterated the Board is in place to make decisions and set the direction of the County but sometimes facts are presented that generate multiple opinions and they try hard to determine what is best for the majority of citizens.

Commissioner Felton thanked everyone for attending especially those folks from Eure. Commissioner Felton encouraged everyone to attend the December 2<sup>nd</sup> 10am meeting because there is going to be a public hearing that will involve a great deal of money and will impact the county. Everyone should attend and let your opinion be known.

Commissioner Jordan thanked citizens for coming and being interested in local government and sometimes the decisions made are difficult and do not please everyone but at the end of the day we are doing what we feel is best for all citizens. We may disagree but we try hard not to be disagreeable.

Commissioner Owens thanked citizens for attending and stated the Chamber of Commerce met at Gates House Assisted Living Facility for their annual dinner and meeting. It was a wonderful dinner at a great facility and their staff did a fantastic job serving the Chamber and the community. They are doing a great job providing service to their residents and may have commended them for what they are doing. For any citizen that has not been to the facility you need to go and tour it and see what great services are offered.

Commissioner Hofler thanked everyone for being in attendance. We have Thanksgiving coming up and we are so blessed to have the freedoms available to us that we do have. Even when we have disagreements there is more information presented and we are able to make better decisions. With the recent events that have occurred in Paris let us be vigilant and work toward making the world a better place. We will meet again December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10am.

**Closed Session**

Commissioner Freeman made a motion to enter into closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 a (4) Economic Development (5) Real Estate, (6) Personnel. Commissioner Jordan seconded the motion; motion passed without opposition.

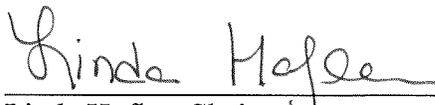
Commissioner Owens made a motion to exit closed session. Commissioner Freeman seconded the motion; motion carried without opposition.

Commissioner Jordan made a motion to appoint Chris Odom to the Planning Board. Commissioner Freeman seconded the motion; motion passed without opposition.

Commissioner Jordan made a motion to approve a salary increase for the Sheriff from a Grade 27 step 14 to a Grade 27 step 16. Commissioner Owens seconded the motion; motion passed without opposition.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Felton made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Freeman seconded the motion; motion passed unanimously.

  
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Linda Hofler, Chairman

  
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Melissa C. Lawrence, Clerk

GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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