



BERTIE COUNTY

106 DUNDEE STREET
POST OFFICE BOX 530
WINDSOR, NORTH CAROLINA
27983
(252) 794-5300
FAX: (252) 794-5327
WWW.CO.BERTIE.NC.US

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
J. WALLACE PERRY, Chairman
CHARLES L. SMITH, Vice-Chairman
RICK HARRELL
JOHN TRENT
RONALD "RON" WESSON

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF
SCOTT SAUER, County Manager
SARAH SEREDNI, Clerk to the Board

June 26, 2014

Contact: County Manager Scott Sauer
Telephone: (252) 794-6112
Email: scott.sauer@bertie.nc.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BERTIE COUNTY APPROVES FY2014-2015 BUDGET

Bertie County holds tax rate at \$0.84 while renewing its commitment to economic development, County employees. Board of Commissioners also restores funding to various non-profit organizations, and educational institutions.

On June 26, 2014 the Bertie County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve a spending plan for next fiscal year totaling \$31.6 million including the four water districts. The General Fund budget for FY 2014-2015 is \$19,829,419 with the tax rate unchanged at 84 cents.

The Board of Commissioners spent many hours individually and collectively, reviewing, discussing and questioning the proposed spending plan for the fiscal year 2014-2015 which begins July 1st. Chief among the Board's concerns is limiting the impact on property owners and taxpayers, while balancing the many program initiatives proposed for next year.

The Board took steps to defer some capital outlay expenditures, cut operating expenses and limited the growth in County services to provide for only the most critical services. These cuts totaled just over \$600,000 and provided the budget reduction necessary to hold the tax rate at 84 cents.

The Board also employed a measured use of appropriated fund balance reserves, limiting this amount to \$574,527 which is nearly parallel to the amount of growth in fund balance when the 2013 budget was closed out.

Funding is provided for an enhanced approach for the County's economic development program with \$103,467 made available as a strategic initiative fund in support of the Board's four business development platforms adopted early this year. These areas include:

- 1) Agribusiness—with a focus on farm related enterprises.
- 2) Bio-Mass and Energy—with an initial focus on methane gas electricity generation, wood residue and crop by-products as a fuel source.

3) Adventure Tourism—capitalizing on wildlife resources (hunting, fishing and bird watching), plus eco-tourism to include canoeing/kayaking, hiking trails, enhanced boating access, and harbor/marina facilities to support sailing regattas and competition.

4) Waterfront development to expand on the initial investment in housing, vacation properties, and “stay over” opportunities to support recreation and tourism.

In support of this enhanced approach for economic development, the Board has allotted a monthly retainer provision in the budget to secure grant writing and project development services to assist with maintaining momentum for each of these initiatives.

Commissioners spent a great deal of time listening to proposals and working to understand the needs of various agencies.

One result was the expanded support for the Sheriff’s night time patrol with the addition of four new deputy positions. The Board also has supported efforts to upgrade the computer software and hardware for the Sheriff’s 911 Communications Center, and provided capital outlay funding to replace six (6) vehicles in the Sheriff’s Office.

Secondly, after a detailed budget briefing from the Bertie County Schools Superintendent, the Board unanimously agreed to support her initiative to maximize the County’s use of State lottery funds (in excess of \$500,000) to partially restore school capital outlay monies and set aside the remainder in the School capital reserve fund for future debt service payments. The Commissioners also continue to work in support of the Board of Education’s effort to establish a new vehicle maintenance facility for school buses. And the Commissioners are very much attuned to the fiscal challenges facing our school system with State budget cuts and evolving school opportunities in our County.

Funding for school operations, capital outlay and loan payments for the new high school and middle school remain the most significant budget priority for our County.

Thirdly, Commissioners discussed the role of nonprofit agencies and the importance of their positive impact for Bertie County citizens. Where possible, the Board worked to restore some or most of the cuts that these organizations experienced in prior year reductions in funding. The Board recognizes the strong benefits afforded to county residents by the two community colleges that serve Bertie County, as demonstrated by the funding allocations for both institutions next year. Likewise, the Commissioners struck a fiscal balance with organizations such as the regional library system, to secure cost sharing for a roof replacement project, in exchange for restoration of operating funds at the Lawrence Memorial Library in Windsor. And funding for the Aulander branch library also remains intact for next year.

And most importantly, as highlighted in the original proposed budget plan for FY 2014-2015, the Board of Commissioners continues to honor its commitment to ensure the highest level of emergency pre-hospital medical care through the County’s 911 Paramedic program. Based on our current workload, we expect to respond to 4,000 calls in the next twelve months.

In tandem with the 911 Paramedic program, beginning in the new budget year, Bertie County will offer Non-Emergency Transport Services (NETS) to all citizens seeking medical transport service between facilities. The Board is very excited about this business model for both service components, which has been designed to minimize the tax burden to support these critical services.

Moving the County forward, securing a strong economic future, and capitalizing on Bertie County's strengths, the Board of Commissioners is setting the stage for progress and a brighter future for Bertie County.

The Board has set aside funds to begin a multi-year effort to address Courthouse preventive maintenance needs and appearance issues, which will extend the facility's life and improve its curb appeal in the downtown business district. Funds are also budgeted in the special appropriations category to support cooperative programming efforts between the YMCA and the County's Parks and Recreation Department.

In late 2013, the Commissioners engaged a new engineering firm to evaluate the County's water utility system, seeking strategies to improve efficiency and to insure the County's ability to serve its water customers for decades to come. This effort continues with funding for tools and equipment to support the Water Department, and adjustments to the water rates to stabilize the system's financial viability as the County protects its investment in this vital utility.

Where possible, the Board has provided funds to make technology improvements as evidenced by its support for replacement of the Tax Department's twenty-two year old computer server which houses the County's land records system. Not every funding request was supported however, and difficult decisions had to be made in order to meet the most critical needs in the near term. Priorities then can be established to address future needs as funds are identified, and carefully planned for future budget proposals.

From management's perspective, where the Board excelled the most, has been taking steps to protect our human capital—the long time County employees who have been loyal and hardworking stewards of the public's trust. This budget plan provides for recognition of employees who were hired before June 30, 2013 with a four percent (4%) market based adjustment in base salary. This acknowledgement allows the Board to show gratitude and appreciation for the value that each employee brings to our organization.

I am indebted to the governing body for its many hours in work sessions, establishing priorities and for creating a new vision for Bertie County. And the citizens and taxpayers should be proud of their elected officials who took the proposed budget plan and made it their own. The Board crafted a strategy to avoid a tax increase while preserving the integrity of the General Fund's reserves. And the Board went to many lengths, to listen, to deliberate, to ask questions and to examine the use of the public's money to determine the most appropriate way to meet the needs of our citizens.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Sauer

County Manager