

**GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
MAY 14, 2015**

The Gates County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session at 2:00 p.m. Thursday, May 14, 2015 in the Main Court Room, 202 Court Street, Gatesville. Commissioners Hofler, Owens, Jordan, Felton and Freeman were present. Also present was County Manager, Natalie Rountree and Finance Director, Sandy Pittman.

Chairman Hofler led in prayer and the pledge of allegiance.

Chairman Hofler called the meeting to order.

The Board reviewed the proposed budget for the Governing Body

Dr. Travis Burke, Cooperative Extension District Director, explained Gates is right under 30% funding, counties are being asked to cover 50% of salaries by FY 16/17. Chairman Hofler stated at the present time the funding for 100% of a second secretary is causing budget issues. Dr. Burke said hopefully the second position would be able to be funded using some of the leftover budget for the CED salary and additional County funds. It was previously talked about to share the position or have a floating administrative assistant. Ms. Rountree said 100% of the administrative salary would be required this year and every year after. At this time there are no county positions available and there are not funds in the budget to create a floating position.

Commissioner Owens said we have to look at what happens next year as well. We have tried to find ways to keep a valuable employee but it may not be possible. Commissioner Jordan asked about the severance package costs for the County. Dr. Burke explained there was a potential for 77 administrative assistants to be let go and around 15 have been told they are going to lose their position, there are 3 so far in the district that will be let go. There is a three component plan to calculate the severance payout and the County will be responsible for the same percentage the County pays of the current salary. The employee will get health insurance for a year and the County will pay a percentage of the insurance. The County will not be liable to pay unemployment.

Commissioner Owens verified should we have to let the employee go all of the information will be communicated to the employee through Cooperative Extension.

Chairman Hofler asked how other counties in the district are dealing with the funding issue. Dr. Burke explained one county was able to move the employee to an open county job, one has already retired, and one will be retiring in July.

Chairman Hofler thanked Dr. Burke and reiterated that it will be a difficult decision.

Cathy Horton, Register of Deeds, requested a salary increase for the Register of Deeds and the Deputy Register of Deeds. The Deputy will be employed for six months in September and it is requested she move up to a step 3 which is a difference of \$478 per year. She is deputized and has been attending workshops. Ms. Horton has requested cutting the part time salary by \$500 to cover the costs of the salary increase. The Register of Deeds has completed the basic and advanced schooling and is requesting a one-step increase. Ms. Horton shared with the Board the average salaries for the Deputy and Register of deeds. Commissioner Owens verified the part time staff is only used when there is a sickness in the office or if both staff are required to be out of the office at the same time.

Mr. Lee Riddick, Gates County Housing Committee, thanked the Board for this year's funding and presented detailed information on how the money has been spent. The Housing Committee is now a 501c and has had assistance from Wooten Company to compile a housing assessment booklet. The URP and HCCB funds are drying up which means housing conditions will be worsening. Churches and other community organizations have been making contributions to the program and building ramps. A grant

has been submitted to Lowes Foundation which ranges from \$5,000-\$28,000. The Committee continues to look for other grant options. Mr. Riddick requests the Board renew the \$7,500 that was budgeted for this fiscal year. This year they had grant money from Roanoke Electric, URP and was a buffer for CDBG grants. The housing coordinator was the only paid employee with a stipend of \$1,000 a month. A request has been submitted to Americorps for a volunteer for administration and work volunteers so that funds can be stretched further. The Board thanked Mr. Riddick for his work and service to the community.

The Board reviewed the administrative and finance proposed budget and the customer service department budget. Administration and finance were previously budgeted together before there was a customer service department. Ms. Rountree and Ms. Pittman explained which line items have changed due to the reorganization of the departments.

Commissioner Jordan asked how much is budgeted to come out of fund balance. Ms. Pittman stated the only thing being pulled out of fund balance is \$82,000 budgeted for the tax software project. The water department fund balance is right about 2 million and should stay intact this year.

Ms. Rountree explained the travel is increased because there are employees that will be attending 10 month certification courses. Ms. Pittman explained how the customer service budget will be set up. There is built in money to help cover bank and credit card payments.

Commissioner Owens asked about the cleaning out of cars from the impound lot. Ms. Rountree explained it has been discussed with the Sheriff's office.

The Board reviewed the proposed capital improvements budget. Ms. Rountree shared a list of all capital improvement projects and highlighted those recommended to be funded.

The Board discussed the potential work to be done at the dental office and renewing the contract with the dentist. There was review given to projects at the EIC Building, Historic Courthouse, sheriff's office computers, new contracts for copy machines, tennis court repairs, schools and general computer updates.

The Sheriff provided a list of tasks the Sheriff's Office does for the County, schools, and community. The Sheriff said the proposed budget is about a \$25,000 cut for the office. The animal control line item is being cut from \$3,000 to \$750 which is not acceptable. There is a new truck that is not fully equipped and he said he was hoping to add a second officer so that animal control work could work on the weekends. Sheriff Webb said if he doesn't have the funding to do what he needs to do it's going to be hard for him to answer to citizens for services not provided. The Sheriff requested the two part time courthouse security positions be combined into one full time position. He feels the budget cut is not fair, yes other departments are getting cuts but they don't seem to be as much. He asked the Board to please reconsider some of the cuts especially animal control, drug enforcement, uniforms, and a \$3,000 pay increase for the Sheriff as this will be his last term. The Board thanked the Sheriff for expressing his concerns.

Dr. Williams stated the Board has a tough job just as the School Board, the Sheriff's Office, and many other departments. Dr. Williams feels he wouldn't be much of a superintendent if he didn't come before the Board to petition for our children. Should the School System not receive any additional funding there will have to be a reduction in force. There will be a reduction of teachers hired for the read to achieve program, the summer school program for secondary mathematics will be effected, safety will have to be reduced, driver's education will not be funded, retirement positions will not be filled, classrooms will become larger and discipline issues will increase. Non-essential employee positions will have to be reviewed. Chairman Hofler thanked Dr. Williams for coming and expressed the Boards understanding of the importance of the schools. Dr. Williams requested to know as soon as possible if changes are made to the budget.

The Board discussed the current funding for the school system and the additional \$900,000 requested for operating expenses. Chairman Jordan stated property tax would have to increase close to 50% to be able to cover all of the requests.

Commissioner Jordan would like to see review given to a cost of living increase for employees. It doesn't seem fair to give some employees like the Sheriff a large increase but not give any increase to the rest of the employees. We need to treat all employees fairly and show that we recognize their needs and value their work. Commissioner Owens asked if there is any prediction on how we are going to fair for this year's budget. Ms. Pittman predicted that we will take a hit this year and not be able to put any money into fund balance. Ms. Rountree reiterated that the majority of line items started with a 10% cut. The Board discussed a 1% cost of living increase for employees which would be around \$30,000. Commissioner Felton reminded the Board that a .5% increase would still send a message and save money.

Commissioner Jordan suggested taking \$300,000 out of the fund balance to find funds for schools, cost of living increase, the Sheriff's Office, Cooperative Extension, and the Housing Committee. Ms. Pittman reminded the Board that it is not advisable to cover any recurring costs with fund balance monies. Commissioner Owens said there are some departments that environmental factors may justify granting their request over other departments.

The Board agreed they would all like to see a 1% cost of living increase for county employees.

The Board went back and discussed the staffing dilemma with Cooperative Extension. Ms. Rountree said it is a \$42,000 difference to keep the second administrative staff and it would have to be addressed again next year when the County is required to pay 50% of all salaries. The Board agreed to go with the manager's recommendation to reduce staffing.

Reviewing the Register of Deeds, Chairman Hofler said over the past year we have rewarded employees who have received certifications. If it happened during the year and was presented at the Personnel Board it is likely the Personnel Board would have approved it because it is a certification. Commissioner Owens stated not only has she received certification but she has given the Board a way to pay for it. The deputy register of deeds request would be taken care of with the 1% cost of living increase. The Board decided to stay with the 1% COLA increase for Register of Deeds staff.

The Board went back and reviewed the request from the Housing Committee. Commissioner Jordan made a recommendation to fund \$5,000 of the request and Commissioner Hofler agreed. Ms. Rountree stated there is \$10,000 allocated for Gates Partners for Health. The Board agreed to reduce Gates Partners for Health to \$5,000 and fund the Housing Committee \$5,000.

The Board reviewed a request from the Library for additional funding. The Board agreed to reduce their funding to \$90,000. Instead of a 3% salary increase the Library may agree to give 1% to match the County.

The Board reviewed the request from the School System not including capital funding and decided to leave the funding as presented.

The Board reviewed the Sheriff's budget again. Commissioner Owens and Commissioner Freeman agreed they are okay with the Sheriff's budget staying as recommended by the manager and encouraging the Sheriff to spend the excess amounts left in this year's budget. The Board agreed to leave the Sheriff's budget as presented.

Commissioner Owens said now that employees are receiving a 1% cost of living he would like to see the Chairman receive an increase in stipend. Chairman Hofler declined the increase.


It was reiterated that around \$82,000 plus the \$30,000 cost of living increase will come out of the fund balance.

The Board agreed to accept the capital improvement budget as it was presented by the manager.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Owens made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Felton seconded the motion; motion passed without opposition.

  
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Linda Hofler, Chairman

  
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Melissa C. Lawrence, Clerk

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