

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY/COUNTY JOINT MEETING
FEBRUARY 16, 2011
DIANE HONEYCUTT CENTER, ROOM 130
600 MCLEAN ST.
LAURINBURG, NC
6:00 P.M.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg reconvened its February 15, 2011 agenda workshop meeting on February 16, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. as a joint meeting with the Scotland County Board of Commissioners in Room 130 of the Diane Honeycutt Center located at 600 McLean St., Laurinburg, North Carolina with the Honorable Thomas W. Parker III, Mayor Pro Tem presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Curtis B. Leak and Herbert M. Rainer, Jr. Councilmember Joy Ellison arrived at 6:25 p.m. Councilmember Kenton Spencer arrived at 6:40 p.m. Mayor Matthew Block was absent.

Also present were Edward F. Burchins, City Manager, and Dolores A. Hammond, City Clerk.

Scotland County Commissioners present were: Chairman Bob Davis, Vice Chair Joyce McDow and Commissioners Guy McCook and Carol McCall. Commissioners not in attendance: Commissioners John Alford, John Cooley and Clarence McPhatter.

County Staff in attendance: County Manager Kevin Patterson and Clerk to the Board Ann W. Kurtzman.

Mayor Pro Tem Parker reconvened the meeting at 6:04 P.M. Commissioner McCook gave the invocation.

BRAC-RTF PRESENTATION (BASE REALIGNMENT AND CLOSURE-REGIONAL TASK FORCE)

BRAC Regional Task Force Executive Director Greg Taylor gave a PowerPoint presentation on activities and accomplishments in planning/infrastructure, economic and workforce development and education in the region.

Meeting recessed at 7:04 p.m. and resumed at 7:13 p.m.

CO-LOCATION OF COUNTY TAX OFFICE/CITY BILLING SERVICES TO THE SPELLER AND SANFORD BUILDINGS

The County Manager stated that the co-location of the County Tax office and the City utilities billing services have been discussed for a year now. He explained that options would be to share space or consolidate services. He then stated that use of the Speller Building would resolve some critical space needs for the County and the City.

He then explained that relocating the Tax staff from the Courthouse would reunite them with Mapping and Appraisal staff and bring a convenience to taxpayers who do not wish to pass through the Courthouse security system and make several trips to County and City offices in order to pay bills.

He stated that the estimated co-location cost would be \$225,000 not including furnishings and equipment. He said the cost easily could be \$300,000 to renovate the Speller Building.

The City Manager stated that cross-training would allow for efficiencies and redundancy in equipment would be eliminated. He then stated that the idea of being as efficient as possible with tax dollars is a big consideration.

City Councilmembers and the Scotland County Commissioners had a lengthy discussion on the pros and cons of using the Speller Building as a shared space.

Discussions included how to ensure both entities would pay their fair share of expenses for operations. Commissioner McCook suggested a formula could be developed based on square footage use.

Councilmember Spencer asked if there would be an actual cost savings. He added that systems conversions could be messy.

Mayor Pro Tem Parker commented that both the City and the County need more space, and it comes down to renovation versus building something new. He said he believed there would be a savings down the road.

Upon question by Councilmember Spencer, the County Manager stated that there probably would not be a savings in the first three years, but there could be a savings from future capital projects.

Councilmember Rainer stated that co-location would be a big plus for the citizens of Laurinburg.

There was some discussion about ownership and which governing entity would hold the deed to the Speller Building.

Councilmember Ellison stated that the ownership should be discussed after the condition of the building is researched.

Commissioner McCook stated that the Speller Building, which previously was a bank with a vault and two drive-in windows, adequate parking and a lift, lends itself well to a co-location of tax and utilities billing services in one space.

The County Manager stated that the \$300,000 estimate would not include repairs or resurfacing of the parking lot.

Councilmember Leak expressed concern over the cost of the renovations of the building.

Councilmember Ellison stated that the discussion between the City Manager and the County Manager should begin with how to utilize staff in order to save money.

Commissioner McCook stated that his understanding of the co-location was not to combine services but using the same facility.

Commissioner Chairman Davis said in the long term, and most important, the move would benefit citizens.

A discussion was held on the Sanford Building and this building will be discussed once the Speller Building plan is being developed.

Following further discussion, the City Council, by consensus, agreed the City Manager and County Manager continue to explore the use of the Speller Building as a one stop revenue collections site.

The Board of Commissioners, by consensus, also agreed that the City Manager and County Manager move forward in exploring the co-location of tax and City billing services in the Speller Building.

CONSOLIDATION OF E911 SERVICES

FIRST STEP -- FIRE DISPATCH CURRENTLY OPERATED BY THE CITY OF LAURINBURG

The County Manager stated that the not-yet-received \$650,000.00 Homeland Security Grant would be used to expand the current Emergency Medical Services (EMS) building to create an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and general meeting room when not in use as an EOC.

He then stated that the expansion would allow for consolidation of E911 services, which now are in four locations – the Sheriff's Department, City Police Department, EMS and Fire Department. A centralized call center could accommodate up to four people. He then pointed out that the State intends to impose a new standard where a call center must be manned by at least two people at all times. He then stated that there would be a cost savings since there would not be a need for four separate communicators to be on duty. That number would be doubled with a new State requirement.

The City Manager stated that the City has invested in a records keeping system for the Laurinburg Police Department, and if the consolidation is to take place that equipment would be relocated to the E911 center.

The City Manager asked if fire dispatch could be reviewed before the consolidation of the services. He stated that the City of Laurinburg currently dispatches all fire calls. He then stated he has recommended to City Council that at least one engine company (which would be five people per truck) be available on a 24-hour basis seven days a week so that those calls are covered with an adequate crew.

The County Manager stated that he does not feel that the other three agencies have the search capacity. He explained that the number of law enforcement calls outweigh the fire calls.

Roylin Hammond, Emergency Services Director, explained the call system, the viper radio frequency, the proposed rule changes by the 911 Board, and the lack of space at this time to add additional equipment.

Upon further discussion, the City Council, by consensus, agreed to move forward with the call center consolidation process.

The Board of Commissioners, by consensus, also agreed to move forward with the call center consolidation process.

CITY/COUNTY WATER PROJECT

The County Manager asked the governing boards to consider consolidation of the water systems. He stated that the City operates the water districts. He explained that the County has instituted a three-year fee increase plan to bring a previously low fee structure to a competitive one. The County approved its first water fee increase for the FY 2010-2011 fiscal year. He then explained that the three-year plan is to get the County Water Districts to a profitable situation. He stated that the City and the County last year agreed to look into consolidating the system.

He explained that he and the City Manager had met with USDA (the bond holders). He then explained that right now there is not an easy or practical way to transfer ownership of the water districts. He stated that there is a much easier way by expanding the current contract with the City of Laurinburg and Scotland County. The City would operate the water districts and pay the County a set sum in order that the bond payments are paid. The assets and the debt would remain on the County books. He said the bond debt on the Water Districts would be satisfied in 35 years.

Councilmember Leak expressed concern regarding water rates.

The County Manager stated that the County would match its water rates with the City's rates.

A discussion ensued on rate structures and studies.

The City Manager stated that he and the County Manager agree that a rate analysis should be conducted.

Upon question by Councilmember Ellison, Commissioner Davis stated that the County is not in the water business but that the City is in this business and is more knowledgeable about water systems and rates.

Councilmember Parker stated that the BRAC presentation suggested that Scotland County could be a water/waste disposal hub for the region.

Commissioner McCook asked for a cost benefit analysis before a final decision is made.

Commissioner McCook said a future water plan might include a consortium, where entities participate based on the assets they bring to the system. He explained that the assets in the future could be leveraged into a separate authority.

Following further discussion, the City Council and the Scotland County Commissioners agreed that the City Manager and the County Manager investigate the concept of a separate water authority.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Leak, seconded by Councilmember Spencer, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:32 p.m.

Thomas W. Parker III, Mayor Pro Tem

Dolores A. Hammond, City Clerk