

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
FEBRUARY 19, 2020**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a special meeting with the Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors and staff on Wednesday, February 19, 2020 at 12:00 Noon at the Paradiso Roma Ristorante.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jeff Dixon, Chairman
Lloyd E. Griffin, III, Vice-Chairman (*arrived at 1:00*)
Cecil Perry
Frankie Meads
Charles H. Jordan
Barry Overman

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sean Lavin

OTHERS PRESENT: Sparty Hammett, County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board
Sheri Small, Finance Officer
Steve Harris, Pasquotank SWCD Chairman
Maurice Berry, Pasquotank SWCD Supervisor
Doug Temple, Pasquotank SWCD Supervisor
Chuck Jackson, Pasquotank SWCD Supervisor
Dwane Hinson, Pasquotank SWCD Technician
Brian Lannon, Camden SWCD Technician/District Administrator
Mark Powell, Program & Project Management Consultant,
Albemarle RC&D
Rodney Johnson, Albemarle RC&D
Dillan Lloyd, Currituck SWCD Technician
Cathy Smith, Pasquotank SWCD District Administrator

Steve Harris, Pasquotank Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) Chairman, welcomed everyone. He gave the invocation and lunch was served.

Following lunch, SWCD Technician Dwane Hinson said today he would like to address drainage issues and water quality issues, as well as some mechanisms they would like to suggest to the Board. He said additionally he would touch on solar fields, windmills, swamp forest clearcutting, and water quality monitoring programs.

Mr. Hinson asked the Board to consider a new community based mechanism for solving drainage problems. He said it can be a collaborative effort between the County Government, RC&D, Soil & Water, NCDOT, and private landowners. They would like to do projects on a watershed scale, because the problems cannot be solved by dealing with just single landowners. NCDOT is limited because they can't deal with offsite landowners. He said RC&D and Soil & Water have offered to put plans together and coordinate with the land owners, if DOT will present projects and possibly fund parts of them. In addition, they are trying to utilize North Carolina Ag Cost Share Money and grants.

With the \$45,000 budgeted by the County this year, they are working on drainage issues on Newland Road; flooding in the area near Northside School; salt water intrusion problem in the southern part of the county; flooding in Weeksville; flooding on Firetower Road; flooding and erosion on Foreman Bundy Road; flooding on Sandy Road; and work on the Newland Dike.

Mr. Hinson said flooding from the Great Dismal Swamp is an ongoing issue that will not be solved during our lifetime. County Manager Hammett explained that NCDOT said in order for them to move forward with a project both Perquimans and Gates County would need to be on board. He met with both Perquimans and Gates Counties and they were not on board, therefore it killed the project. Mr. Hinson said we have the technology to help fix the problem, but politics are the issue.

Mr. Hinson said the County needs a maintenance program for clearing and snagging. He stated that swamp logging has been an issue for a long time. He understands the importance of logging, but we have got to have some changes. Currently, there are virtually no buffer rules and they are inadequate to protect our drainage. If not, storms will completely inundate the area and overflow and drag trash back into the channel, as well as impact the immediately downstream water quality, and cause algal blooms, due to surges of nitrogen. He suggested a 100' buffer to prevent windthrow and to manage water quality and flooding issues. He said commissioners need to really think about future development in areas that currently flood within the county.

Mr. Hinson stated that construction of solar fields and windmill projects usually result in land use disturbance over many acres, especially considering road and drainage system disturbance associated with accessing isolated construction sites. The nutrients and sediment released during this process usually end up in the ditch water of the watershed drainage system. These excess nutrients usually produce algal blooms in the drainage systems. He said these blooms have been traced moving through the downstream creeks and rivers to the Albemarle Sound. Uncontrolled and unfiltered drainage systems play a significant role in the occurrence of algal blooms. Conservation practices have been developed for farm drainage systems to remove some of the excess nutrients from drainage water. He said the County needs to change some of their special condition permits to include drainage maintenance easements, drainage systems in wetlands, water control structures, rock drop structures, and drainage improvements. He feels the developers need to contribute to improving the watershed and addressing the water quality issues.

Mr. Mark Powell stated that there are a lot of partners working on the water quality issue. Most of their efforts currently are focused on the cause of the algal blooms. After an absence of 30 years, the blooms have returned. He said everybody is a part of the problem and everybody needs to be a part of the solution.

Mr. Powell said another problem they face is there are not enough water quality monitors in northeastern North Carolina. There is only one on the Perquimans River, one on the Little River, and one on the Pasquotank River. Enough data is not being picked up to tell them enough about water quality. The Department of Environmental Quality and the UNC Institute of Marine Science have done some studies and concluded that the nutrients are not coming down from Virginia. We have seen increasing organic nitrogen across the region for the past twenty years, and increasing water temperatures in the Chowan River over the last 30 years from the Virginia border down to the bridge on US 17. In addition, there is increasing phosphorus and nitrogen in the Little River over the past twenty to thirty years. He said their focus has been to try to narrow down the huge area into hotspots. There is an eight mile section of the Little River listed as impaired for Chlorophyll A, which means it is getting too many nutrients.

Mr. Powell said, with support from Pasquotank County and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, they put out a number of water quality monitoring stations in the region. He said he volunteered some of the Green Saves Green group members to take boats out to collect core samples in the river in Hall Creek, Nixonton Bay, Dances Bay, and the mouth of Simmons Creek. The samples were sent to the lab in Raleigh for analysis. All of the stations had very high phosphorus coming out, but in particular, Simmons Creek, Newbegun, and Knobbs Creek had the highest readings. The highest total nitrogen and organic nitrogen came out at the head of the Little River and at Foreman Bundy Road. He said they now have a better sense of where nutrients are coming in through the tributary creeks. Looking at the data they collected this summer, compared to NC DEQ data, the numbers are pretty much lining up with this increasing trend of organic nitrogen in the Little River. At this point, he said they can start working on these hotspots. He noted that septic systems, above average rainfall, and geese can also play a part and need to be studied. He said their next step is to identify specific sources.

County Manager Hammett noted that the Board of Commissioners approved establishing a Drainage Advisory Committee to address countywide drainage and water quality issues at its meeting on February 3, 2020. The Committee will consist of one voting member from the Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners; one voting member from the Pasquotank County Soil and Water Consideration District; and one voting member from the following five Pasquotank County Drainage Districts: Newland/Perquimans River, Knobbs Creek/Upper Pasquotank, Upper Little River, Lower Little River, and Newbegun/Flatty Creek. He said we are in the process of trying to fill those spots, so the committee can have their first meeting in April.

Steve Harris thanked everyone for attending.

Chairman Dixon thanked the Soil & Water Conservation supervisors and staff for their update and for the lunch provided. The meeting was adjourned at 1:46 PM.

CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO THE BOARD