

PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
APRIL 25, 2017

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners held a retreat on Tuesday, April 25, 2017 at the Museum of the Albemarle, 501 S. Water Street, Elizabeth City.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Cecil Perry, Chairman
Dr. William R. Sterritt, Vice-Chairman
Jeff Dixon
Lloyd E. Griffin, III
Joseph S. Winslow, Jr.
Frankie Meads
Bettie J. Parker

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Rodney Bunch, County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Sheri Small, Finance Officer
Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board
Patrice Roesler, NCACC Deputy Director
Neil Emory, NCACC Outreach Associate

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM by Chairman Cecil Perry. Chairman Perry welcomed everyone present. He said he is grateful every day for the many accomplishments and opportunities that he has living in this great county. He stated that today is very special and he hopes that everyone will have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities as commissioners in Pasquotank County. He said no two people are alike and hopefully today they get a chance to talk to one another in an honest way and learn from each other. He hopes the Board can agree on a vision for the county and how to move forward with the vision.

Assistance in the retreat discussions was provided by NCACC staff, Outreach Associate Neil Emory and Deputy Director Patrice Roesler.

The retreat began with a self-instruction exercise designed to give the commissioners an opportunity to share with each other some little-known information about their personal histories. These personal stories allowed them to begin forming a more personal understanding of each other, to think of each other as real people first, as individuals; they began to appreciate the diversity of views and life experiences they bring to governing Pasquotank County, and to feel stronger as a group.

Following the introduction exercise, Mr. Emory led the commissioners in a discussion about roles and relationships. This part of the agenda focused especially on the relationship between the Chairman and other board members, the Chairman and the County Manager, board members' roles with staff, and the Board's relationship with internal and external partners.

Board members defined their expectations of each other:

- Respect each other, regardless of party affiliation, race or gender; always show respect to each other as individuals.
- Be honest with each other; open lines of communication and be willing to share your opinion respectfully.
- No surprises. Don't surprise your colleagues with information no one else has received. Every board member should have the benefit of the same information. There is a right time and place for sharing and offering new information; discern when it is appropriate.
- Show courtesy towards each other; eliminate distractions, such as phones, and listen actively when others are talking.
- Be united. After the Board has made its decision, move on; show respect for the Board in its decisions. This is not place for partisanship.

Board members talked about the role of the Chair:

- The Chair keeps the meeting on track and does not let any one person dominate the conversation, including him/herself.
- The Chair tries to bring differences towards the middle; politics are a part of governing, but should not be emphasized.
- The Chair should make sure all opinions are voiced.
- The Chair helps build trust between and among the Board members.
- The Chair is the Board's cheerleader.

Board members discussed their relationship with the County Manger and staff and made the following points:

- The strength of our Board is the staff.
- The Board sets policy; the County Manger is responsible for implementing it.
- The Board relies on the staff to make sure we are ready to take action, and that we have all finance issues in advance so the meetings end timely.
- The hiring process is managerial responsibility.

The next part of the retreat challenged the Board to describe the Pasquotank County of their imagination 10 years into the future. Each commissioner provided their description of the future.

Commissioner Meads: The County has no debt and low taxes. The Old Junior High School is a place where Senior Citizens live and the old Middle School is a place where elder-care is provided. We are known as an elder-care county.

Vice-Chairman Sterritt: The waterfront is a vibrant part of our economy. We have increased capacity of the reverse osmosis water plant by 25% and we are now selling water to Elizabeth City, Perquimans County, Camden County and Chowan County. This has enabled us to maintain the health of our Enterprise Fund.

Commissioner Parker: Elizabeth City State is full to capacity and is now the economic engine of our area. We have the revenue needed to support our schools, community college and the university because we adopted the One-Quarter Percent (0.25%) sales tax and the wind farm is helping provide additional revenue.

Commissioner Dixon: We merged with city into the county and we are now a strong commercial hub for our region. We have good beaches close by but there is no congestion because the state completed I-87. This also provides both road and rail access for our new industries that employ upwards of 50 people each. We are the center of an attractive region with a good climate, so we are experiencing growth in the number of retirees to our area.

Chairman Perry: We have become the Golden Triangle since the state completed I-87 (the Golden Highway). Our citizens are really proud of our school achievement progress. We have both a new high school and a middle school. The baby diaper production plant provides 500 jobs for our citizens; we offered the industry some property tax incentives in the form of tax abatement for 10 years to attract the firm to our area.

We helped get a grant to replace the empty storefronts in downtown Elizabeth City. We set aside funds from the lease of our hospital and received some federal grants and subsidies to help us open a new hospital with the latest technology. We are also building a hotel on the water in the Weeksville area.

Based on these individual visions of Pasquotank County ten years from now, the commissioners discussed what they had learned from each other's ideas. Areas of consistency and agreement included:

- A stronger economy for the county is tied to highway infrastructure; the completion of I-87 is a fundamental part of that change and the construction needs to start at the North Carolina/Virginia state line to provide economic stimulation to the region faster;
- Land and water are resources to protect and amplify, and health care access is strong. These resources attract people to the area and are an important part of the county's economy;
- A multitude of groups are focused on economic development in the county and they do not appear to be coordinated.

- The Chamber of Commerce is a membership organization focused on the business community.
 - The Convention & Visitors Bureau uses occupancy tax proceeds to stimulate tourism.
 - The Elizabeth City / Pasquotank County Economic Development Commission supports the Airport Authority and is leading efforts to expand broadband access.
 - The Elizabeth City Recreation Department develops athletic programs to attract people to the area.
 - The Committee of 100 is a private group that has been holding economic development forums.
 - Elizabeth City Downtown is a state and city-funded Main Street development program.
- All these efforts need to be coordinated and the county commissioners are the most appropriate body to undertake the coordination.

Conclusions:

1. The Board of Commissioners is concerned that the multitude of economic development groups need to be more coordinated in their efforts; the Board wants to be actively involved in making that happen.
2. The Board wants to know more about how programs are currently marketed, advertised and promoted.
3. The Board of Commissioners will attend community meetings as a group and show unity and strength; they will make sure they are invited to attend and be an active part of all economic development discussions, and they will take a leadership role in making this happen.
4. The Board will invite representatives of all the economic development groups to make presentations about their work and activities at upcoming Board meetings; they want to include the school board in these discussions.
5. The commissioners want to cultivate younger leadership for the county and serve as role models. Understanding the county's generational mix is important to being able to do this; a good resource for help in this regard is the Operations Research and Education Laboratory at NC State University.
6. The Board of Commissioners agreed that leadership has to come from the county; they will take advantage of every opportunity to press the county's issues.
7. The Board agreed there is unlimited potential in Pasquotank County and they need to hold a work session at some point to discuss visions and goals for the County.

The retreat was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO THE BOARD