

**PASQUOTANK COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA
NOVEMBER 30, 2020**

The Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners met today in a joint meeting with the City Council of Elizabeth City on Monday, November 30, 2020 in the Foreman Center Building at College of the Albemarle.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jeff Dixon, Chairman
Lloyd E. Griffin, III, Vice-Chairman
Cecil Perry
Frankie Meads
Charles Jordan
Barry Overman
Sean Lavin

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Sparty Hammett, County Manager
R. Michael Cox, County Attorney
Lynn Scott, Clerk to the Board

Also present were the Mayor and Council, the Interim City Manager, the Assistant City Manager, the City Clerk, and Deputy City Clerk. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM by Chairman Jeff Dixon and Mayor Bettie Parker. Following the invocation, everyone recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. Chairman Dixon and Mayor Parker provided brief opening statements. Mayor Parker commended Chairman Dixon for his many years of public service to the citizens of Pasquotank County. She said she has found him to be a man of high caliber character, and noted that she will truly miss him.

1. PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ON WAYFINDING SIGNS BY BUZZ BIZZELL AND DEBORAH MALENFANT:

Ms. Malenfant stated that the simplest way to define wayfinding is to say signage, but that is a bit too simplistic. Wayfinding is an entire information system that helps to guide people. It is a carefully planned sequence that gives information to people at key decision points, on their way to a destination. It is a combination of design, signage, maps, symbols, and eventually technology that also establishes a brand identity for a community. She stated that the team that has been working on the project started working on it back in June 2019. It was a unified effort of the City Manager Rich Olsen at the time and currently Eddie Buffalo, County Manager Sparty Hammett, Chamber Executive Director Holly Staples, Economic Development Director Christian Lockamy, Visit Elizabeth City Executive Director Corrina Ruffieux, herself - representing Elizabeth City Downtown Incorporated, and the consultant Buzz Bizzell.

Ms. Malenfant said the team feels that wayfinding is much needed in our community for both visitors and for residents. The plan that will be presented tonight is very thorough, comprehensive, well thought out, and inclusive.

Mr. Bizzell said the team has designed a comprehensive system of signs. Each sign links to tell a story about the area. It is directed towards visitors, but residents get a tremendous benefit from the signs as well, because it locates things that they may not know are there.

Mr. Bizzell explained that the comprehensive wayfinding program for Elizabeth City was based on a scope of work designed to achieve five specific objectives for the City and County: 1) Unified Approach to Directions. The wayfinding study itself will create an organized approach to giving and advertising directions, leading people to their destination. The team logged in hundreds of miles (both driving and walking), organized over 151 photographs and created 121 drawings, maps, and documents. 2) Location Association. While visitors following a path to a specific destination for the first time stay on course, each sign gives them vital information to increase their knowledge about the city. They will become more likely to extend their stay and visit longer during future trips. 3) Where to Stop. Parking is a key component to wayfinding. Our goal is to create a good feeling about using surface parking. When combined with wayfinding, parking signs place visitors and locals close to their destination, which in turn supports local business. 4) Branding. This is the highest value attributed to wayfinding signage.

The brand elements, logo, colors, architectural style all combine to create hundreds of thousands of impressions. These signs tell everyone they are welcome. Because of the wayfinding function, Departments of Transportation allow for dozens of signs to be placed within their right-of-way. This amount of brand positioning would be impossible otherwise. 5) Benchmarking. The design of the wayfinding signage establishes a quality standard for the region's brand that sets the stage and encourages others to follow. Other towns have realized the benefit of such region-wide improvements.

Mr. Bizzell provided illustrations of the proposed signage, as well as the following breakdown of the cost:

- 18-Downtown wayfinding signs, 6-Double faced parking signs, and one information kiosk - \$92,400
- 27-Boulevard wayfinding signs - \$156,600
- Total suggested budget is estimated, and includes materials, production & manufacturing, and labor to install - \$249,000.

Ms. Malenfant said as the two main decision making entities, they are asking for support of the plan and financial commitment from City Council and County Commissioners so they can move forward with the next steps toward implementation. She said this commitment will allow them to submit the plan to the NC Department of Transportation for review and approvals, distribute an official RFP to get firm pricing on the production of the product, and work to secure additional funding sources and grant dollars. Once they have approval from NCDOT, they will have six months from the date of the approvals to complete the installations. Commitment from both of the Boards will give them enough buy-in to engage the process, to begin soliciting those additional dollars and possible grant dollars. She stated that they will make an official ask at a future meeting. She noted that Visit Elizabeth City has assumed most of the financial risk of the program up to this point. They paid for the consulting services and they will be asking their full board on Thursday for an additional \$75,000 contribution. She said they would like to initially ask each board for a commitment of up to \$75,000 (from tourism funds). Hopefully, with additional funds and possible grants it will be less than that.

Chairman Dixon, who serves as the County's representative on the TDA Board, noted that the County ended the year with approximately \$80,000 in funds.

Commissioner Meads asked where there is shopping downtown. Ms. Malenfant noted that there are 16 dining and eating establishments in downtown and close to 30 shopping opportunities in downtown. Ms. Ferguson noted that his question is a great example of why we should add these signs. She noted that they are just as important for locals as they are for visitors, because many people do not know where to park or shop. She said that as part of the project, Mr. Bizzell designed a very detailed downtown map, and she and Ms. Malenfant have been working to add detail to the map that will allow them to specifically locate each retail type establishment that a consumer could walk in the door. They will have the map available on the kiosk, which will be the gateway entry for boaters and for people who drive here. She said the whole intent of the project is to drive consumers, whether they are locals or visitors into our businesses so they spend money and the businesses survive.

Motion was made by Barry Overman, seconded by Charles Jordan to support the wayfinding program with an appropriation of up to \$75,000 (with TDA funds). An application will need to be submitted. The motion carried unanimously.

The City Council spoke in support, and made a motion to add the item to their December 14, 2020 agenda. The Tourism Board will consider the request at their meeting on Monday.

2. PRESENTATION BY ELIZABETH CITY PASQUOTANK PUBLIC SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT:

Dr. Catherine Edmonds, ECPPS Superintendent, provided an overview and update on ECPPS' activities.

Dr. Edmonds said she is quite proud to say that although they are in challenging time, they have been able to step up to the challenge. Some students have returned to campus at this time. Pre-k and elementary students returned on October 19th, Middle School students returned on November

2nd, and High School students returned on November 9th. She noted that it looks very different than it did when they left in March. Pre-k through 5th grade attend school four days per week, while middle and high school students attend one to two days per week. Transportation is challenging due to social distancing, but many parents are bringing their children to school, which has helped tremendously.

Dr. Edmonds said as they were thinking of their return to campus and what they need to put in place to ensure safety protocols are in place, they partnered with Albemarle Regional Health Services and ABC Science Collaborative, which is a team of doctors from Duke who specialize in infectious diseases. She said they leaned heavily on the ABC Science Collaborative, as well as ARHS. They meet with the doctors regularly as a region. She is hopeful the schools will remain open unless they start to have secondary spread. Their challenge is that they have a very limited number of substitute teachers this year. They are getting to a point where if a teacher needs to be out or a group has to be quarantined, they may have to send those students to remote status until the teacher comes back. Each school has an individual Return to Campus Guide Book on their website, with their specific guidelines. Additionally, ECPPS' website has a COVID Dashboard, which shows cases at individual schools. Across the district, they have had four positive cases, but they have not had any secondary spread, and have not had to shut down any schools.

She provided an update on the number of students back in school. Elementary Schools have about 50% of their students back on campus. On average, about 35% of Middle School students are back on campus. In High School, the Early College has approximately 14% of students back on campus, Northeastern High School has approximately 15%, and Pasquotank County High School as approximately 22%.

The North Carolina Education Corps allows them to have extra hands on deck in the school district to help students who are remote learning that need extra help. She said they are part of the inaugural cohort. Every district did not get chosen. They had to put in an application, and she went through an interview process. She explained that it is a partnership with the North Carolina State Board of Education, The Office of the Governor, local school districts and systems, and the North Carolina Commission of Volunteerism and Community Service. She said they also had to apply for the funds to support the program.

Dr. Edmonds said they are running 29 regular buses and they are proud to say that they do not have any double runs and their route time has actually been reduced to 45 minutes to an hour. She noted that they continue to provide free lunch for all students. From August to October, they have served 252,963 meals. Additionally, they contracted some custodial services to ensure that their schools are safe and clean.

With money received from the State, they were able to purchase handheld thermometers, face shields, gowns, and surgical masks. They received five reusable masks per student and teacher. She said they also purchased temperature scanners that take temperatures as individuals walk in, which has been very helpful. They received \$1,293,677 in State funds, \$1,719,283 in Federal funds, and \$250,000 in local funds. She thanked the County for what they have done to support them in their technology, but also for providing additional funds for them to buy safety equipment and signage.

Dr. Edmonds stated that ECPPS has purchased 450 laptops, 923 chrome books, and hotspots. The State provided 340 of the hotspots. They also have technology support for afterhours for parents and students.

Vice-Chairman Griffin said one of the main concerns he hears is about the number of teachers who have resigned. Dr. Edmonds said their biggest workforce issue area is their special needs programs. Some teachers are staying remote due to health concerns. They have contracted with some retired teachers, as well as student teachers.

Commissioner Overman commended the staff at ECPPS. He said who would have known when the commissioners approved the funding five or six years ago for the 1-1 initiative that we would need it today. He stated that we would be dysfunctional had we not had those chrome books to send home with the students. Dr. Edmonds said they were able to transition from the classroom to the cloud in a matter of a day. There were school districts that were struggling because

everyone was trying to get devices at the same time. She said they cannot thank our County Commissioners enough, and they are very grateful for all the support they have received.

Commissioner Lavin said under these unprecedented challenges Dr. Edmonds and her team have done a great job. He is very encouraged to continue to see her and her team make refinements in their plan and to continue to make it better. Dr. Edmonds said she has a great team to work with. Her principals, teachers, and students have all been amazing. Other districts have come to them asking how they are able to do the things they are doing.

3. PRESENTATION – SENTARA BY DR. PHIL JACKSON:

Sentara Albemarle Medical Center President Dr. Phil Jackson thanked the Board for allowing him to come and provide an update of what they are doing at the hospital. He provided an update on COVID-19, Flu Drive, Access to Care, Sentara – Cone Health Merger, and the new hospital.

COVID-19 – As of today, North Carolina has over 364,000 cases. Like other states, the numbers are climbing. The hospital has performed over 8,100 tests so far this year. The approximate positivity rate is 7%, which is lower than the state. Approximately 70% of the people who are tested are treated and released to quarantine at home. Contact tracing is performed through Albemarle Regional Health Services. Thirty percent are admitted, most of which are not on ventilators. Dr. Jackson said they have seen an increase in the number of positives over the last weeks. The numbers today were the highest yet. This requires a lot of resources. He stated that they are able to take care of the patients. They have several different areas in the hospital to take care of the positive patients. There are no issues with PPE or staffing. If necessary, they can expand to 185 beds.

Dr. Jackson stated that they are working with the Department of Health and Human Services in North Carolina. There has not been any definitive date yet as to when we will receive the vaccine. The news is reporting it will be in the December timeframe. The vaccine will be administered to healthcare workers first, followed by the community. He said it will not be required, but it is probably one of the best things you can do.

Flu Drive – The recent flu drive was very successful. Approximately 700 vaccinations were administered. Masks have really helped with the number of flu cases this year.

Expansion of Care – They have continued to recruit providers in the local community to include (1) orthopedic surgeon, (3) primary care physicians, (1) OB/GNY, and (1) general surgeon. They are currently looking to recruit a GI physician, a urology physician, and an infectious disease physician.

Video visits have become the normal since COVID-19 and he believes some huge changes are coming with regards to video visits in the future.

Merger with Cone Health

Dr. Jackson stated that Cone Health is a very high quality healthcare organization that is located in Greensboro. He believes our local hospital will still be more closely linked to Sentara in Virginia due to our locations. He said Cone Health is well renowned for its care and services. They have five hospitals, 13,000 workers, 600 physicians, and have 100 sites of care. When the revenues are added together, it totals approximately \$11 billion per year. He stated that the merger is still unfolding as he speaks.

New Hospital

Dr. Jackson provided a video of the future hospital, which will be located on Halstead Boulevard. The hospital will include 110 licensed beds, 8 operating rooms, 6 LDRS (labor, delivery, recovery & postpartum) rooms, 33 emergency department rooms (with dedicated safe rooms for behavioral health patients), full imaging unit, and 2 medical office buildings.

Dr. Jackson thanked the County and City for working with them to get to the point where they are now. They have submitted the certificate of need to the state. They received word back that the application is complete. It will be taken under review, and hopefully they will hear something back in March or April.

4. DISCUSSION – TRANSFORM PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO A PARKS & RECREATION BOARD:

County Manager Hammett provided a brief history of the Parks and Recreation Interlocal Agreement. He stated that the first Interlocal Agreement consolidating Parks and Recreation was entered into on April 27, 2010. The Agreement gave management and operation to the City effective July 1, 2010, with an initial term of five years with a funding ratio of – County 55% and City 45%. There have been four Amendments to the Interlocal Agreement:

- The Interlocal Agreement was amended on June 6, 2011 to better define the structure of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and add an additional (7th) member recommended by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and approved by the City and County.
- A second Interlocal Agreement Amendment was entered into on August 13, 2012 to better define procedures for budget adoption by the City and County.
- A third Interlocal Agreement Amendment was entered into on April 29, 2014, which amended Section 4 - Budget/Finance and Section 8 – Duration, which required the City to provide an expense report to the County along with its bill on a quarterly basis.
- A fourth Interlocal Agreement Amendment was entered into in June 2020, which extended the agreement for one year until June 30, 2021. The Amendment also stated “prior to December 31, 2020, the City and County shall meet and determine whether this Agreement shall be extended and to discuss any modifications that may be necessary.”

Mr. Hammett said he is recommending a fifth Interlocal Agreement Amendment which would provide an additional level of communications and coordination between the City and County by amending the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board section. Prior to the last 3-months, the County often found out about key aspects of Parks and Recreation operations in the Former City Manager’s FYI or in the Daily Advance. Disconnects in the Senior Center project reinforced the need for proposed amendment, with the Crosswalk being the most significant issue. Converting the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to a Parks and Recreation Board with oversight authority would help ensure that both the City and County are fully informed regarding major projects and the future direction of Parks and Recreation.

The Current composition of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board includes:

- One County Commissioner and One City Councilor;
- Two County Citizens and Two City Citizens; and
- One Member appointed by City & County upon recommendation of PRAB.

The following would be the recommended change in the composition of the new Parks and Recreation Board:

- Two County Commissioners and Two City Councilors;
- One County Citizen and One City Citizen;
- One Member appointed by City & County recommend by P&R Board; and
- City Manager and County Manager would serve as Ex Officio Members.

Mr. Hammett stated that the function and authority of the Parks and Recreation Board should parallel the Pasquotank-Camden EMS Board. Camden County has equal representation (2 Commissioners) on a Board that serves as a clearinghouse for all key operational issues prior to placement on a Pasquotank County Board of Commissioners agenda. The Emergency Management Control Group is another good example of how a mechanism for open communications and action helps ensure that both the City and County have complete information and input into decisions that are made that are in the best interest of all of our citizens. Key operational issues would be vetted through the P&R Board prior to being presented to both bodies to help ensure that we have a unified approach in providing joint Parks and Recreation services to our citizens.

The City Council voted unanimously to approve the recommended changes. Mr. Hammett noted that the Board of Commissioners voted previously to approve the changes. Mayor Pro Tem Walton said all of our boards need to be consistent, with best practices. He noted that the Tourism Development Authority is very unbalanced in its representation. He asked that the County Board of Commissioners look into the composition of that board. Chairman Dixon noted

that the TDA Authority was formed by statute, and was written by the General Assembly. Changes will need to go back through the General Assembly.

5. TOURISM UPDATE BY CORRINA RUFFIEUX:

Tourism Director Corrina Ruffieux stated that the US Travel Association calculates the holistic economic impact of tourism to all fifty states and every county within each fifty states each year. In the fall, she received our numbers for 2019. She said it was a record breaking year, with the most spending in Pasquotank County ever. Local tourism expenditures means spending by a visitor at our retail stores, restaurants, hotels, grocery stores, gas stations, etc. Over \$70 million was spent just in Pasquotank County in 2019, which was up almost 6.5% from the year prior. Tourism put over 520 local people to work, which makes them one of the biggest employers in the region if it was counted as one entity. The City and County collected over \$1.6 million in taxes from those visitors. Because of that, every City and County household saves \$380 annually in their taxes. The last few years, our payroll numbers have been increasing slightly above average. In 2019, there was over \$11 million in payroll in Pasquotank County just from visitors.

She said due to COVID-19, next year's numbers will not look as good. When the worldwide pandemic was declared the end of February, \$20.3 billion were being spent in the entire US every week on travel. In May, when we were in the midst of our lockdowns, with no travel what so ever, we were down to \$2.6 billion a week. There were small spikes around July 4th and Labor Day. She said the numbers are starting to climb, but we are still far below the \$20 billion a week that we were at.

North Carolina's baseline on February 29th was \$8 billion dollars less than the same week last year. Then, there was a huge plummet down to a loss of \$446 million a week. Similarly, there were spites around July 4th and Labor Day. We are beginning to climb out, but we are still pretty flat.

She only has monthly data for Pasquotank County, but it is pretty similar to the state and national numbers. Pasquotank County has climbed out a little better than some of our peers, because we are not as reliant on convention business. September is still down almost 18%. What that means in actual cash dollars to the Tourism Development Authority, is a loss of over \$136 thousand from the pandemic to their budget.

Ms. Ruffieux stated that they have been incredibly fortunate and had the opportunity to apply for, receive, and partner with the County to receive over \$90 thousand in CARES Act funding. The funding was used to supplement that massive loss. She thanked the County for partnering with them. They were able to do things that they were never able to do before. First, they partnered with a national public relations firm. Their job is to get Elizabeth City in the media. She said they have been in places they've never been before as a destination. MSN included us in a story called "Small US Towns to add to your travel bucket list". They also partnered with them to come up with an incredibly creative promotion, "Calling all Elizabeths", with the catch being if your name is Elizabeth, you should come to Elizabeth City. She stated that it went like wildfire. Fox News called her and wanted quotes from her. The name Elizabeth City is now out there. This weekend, Forbes listed Elizabeth City as "Five Idyllic American Small Towns to Visit in 2021". She said stuff like this helps with things like recruiting doctors. It goes way beyond travel, and has long-term impacts.

Ms. Ruffieux said they were also able to partner with a technology firm, which has a more short-term impact, but just as important. They created and launched the "Our E. City Shop and Dine Pass". It is a mobile pass, which is free to consumers and businesses who participate. There are over thirty participating businesses (shops and restaurants). As a consumer, you sign up and receive an app on your phone, you walk into a shop, and you either get a discount or you can check in. Ten check ins and you receive a free t-shirt. She said now we will have people walking all around town wearing our E. City t-shirts. Even though it just launched, they've already had five people pick up t-shirts. She asked the Boards to download the app, engage with it, and share it with staff or coworkers. The more people who sign up, the more people who will go into our businesses and spend money and help keep our small businesses open. She said she looks forward to coming back and doing a more comprehensive overview of some of the successes, and looking at our tourism numbers and how we can all work together to continue to make our City and our County grow.

6. DISCUSSION – UPCOMING DATES FOR JOINT MEETING:

After brief discussion, the Boards agreed to tentatively set March 29, 2021 and November 29, 2021 as potential dates for joint meetings next year.

Chairman Dixon asked if there was any further business to come before the Board. There being no further business;

Motion was made by Charles Jordan, seconded by Sean Lavin to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 7:18 PM.

CHAIRMAN

CLERK TO THE BOARD