GRANVILLE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
March 3, 2025
GRANVILLE EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTER
4185 US Highway 15 South, Oxford, North Carolina

PRESENT:
Chair Jimmy Gooch
Vice-Chair Zelodis Jay
Commissioner Robert Williford
Commissioner Mark Griffin
Commissioner Tony W. Cozart
Commissioner Russ May

County Manager Drew Cummings
Deputy County Manager Korena Weichel
County Attorney James C. Wrenn, Jr.

CALL TO ORDER

At 7:00 p.m., Chair Jimmy Gooch called the meeting to order. Chair Gooch had the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CONSENT AGENDA

Motioned by Commissioner Mark Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, and unanimously carried, Board moved item number 9, Retirement of K9 Lena, to the consent agenda.

Motioned by Commissioner Mark Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, and unanimously carried, Board approved the consent agenda as follows:

A. Approved the following tax refunds, releases and write-offs:
- Refunds January 24, 2025 – February 17, 2025: $1,467.06
- Releases January 24, 2025 – February 17, 2025: $3,542.54
- Write-offs ($2 and less) January 24, 2025 – February 17, 2025: $37.85

B. Approved updating and resubmitting the Statewide Mutual Aid Agreement with required state signatures.

C. Approved adopting the updated State of Emergency Ordinance (Granville County Code Chapter 20).

D. Approved declaring the following vehicles as surplus, to be sold via an online auction platform or by Enterprise Fleet Management if EFM chooses to accept the vehicles for sale:

VIN	Year	Department	Make	Model	Mileage	Condition
2C3CDXKT9KH749688	2019	Sheriff's Office	Dodge	Charger	100,000+	End of life
1GNSKDEC3KR159095	2019	Sheriff's Office	Chevrolet	Tahoe	100,000+	End of life
2C3CDXAT2GH356625	2016	Sheriff's Office	Dodge	Charger	100,000+	End of life

INTRODUCTIONS, RECOGNITIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Board Presented Proclamation Recognizing Butner-Stem Middle School Boys Soccer Team

Chair Gooch invited the Butner-Stem Middle School boys' soccer team to come forward. He read the proclamation and presented it to Head Coach Ed Sosa.

Head Coach Sosa expressed appreciation for the commissioners and emphasized the importance of teamwork. He noted that although the team lost its first two games, they adapted, communicated well, and remained persistent. He highlighted that playing soccer was not just about the sport but also about mentorship, comparing his role to that of a father figure. He encouraged the players to believe in themselves and view their experience as valuable as they move on to ninth grade. He concluded by urging them to keep pushing forward and never give up.

Proclamation Recognizing Butner-Stem Middle School Boys Soccer Team for Winning the 2024 Middle School Athletic Conference (MAC-10) Championship

WHEREAS, the Butner-Stem Middle School Boys Soccer Team has demonstrated outstanding dedication, teamwork, and sportsmanship throughout the 2024 season; and

WHEREAS, under the leadership of Head Coach Ed Sosa and Assistant Coaches Buono Salvatore Jr. and Melisa Balas, the team secured the 2024 Middle School Athletic Conference (MAC-10) Championship title, bringing pride and recognition to their school and the Granville County community; and

WHEREAS, Principal Ashley Clark has provided steadfast leadership and support for the team, fostering a culture of excellence both in academics and athletics at Butner-Stem Middle School; and

WHEREAS, the players, guided by their coaches and supported by their principal, families, teachers, and school staff, exhibited hard work and determination both on and off the field; and

WHEREAS, this remarkable achievement reflects not only their athletic ability but also their discipline, character, and perseverance in achieving excellence; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners wishes to formally recognize and commend the Butner-Stem Middle School Boys Soccer Team for their exceptional accomplishment;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED that the Granville County Board of Commissioners does hereby congratulate the Butner-Stem Middle School Boys Soccer Team on winning the 2024 Middle School Athletic Conference (MAC-10) Championship and commends them for their dedication and success.

Board Received Presentation from Franklin Granville Vance Smart Start

Dr. Linda Frederickson, Early Childhood Systems Director, presented on behalf of Franklin Granville Vance Smart Start. She spoke from the presentation included in the agenda packet. Key points included:

- **Introduction**
  - Dr. Frederickson thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Franklin-Granville-Vance Smart Start.
  - Clarified misconceptions about Smart Start, emphasizing that it collaborates with but is separate from programs like Head Start and Warner Opportunities.
- **Smart Start's Mission & Programs**
  - Supports children and families with children ages five and under in three counties.
  - Assists early childhood teachers in accessing higher education.
  - Added a behavior support specialist to assist educators rather than diagnose children.

  - Provides a childcare health consultant to improve program quality.
  - Helps childcare centers improve their ratings from three-star to five-star status.
- **Importance of Early Childhood Development**
  - Emphasized brain development occurs most rapidly from birth to age three.
  - Advocated for interactive learning and reading instead of excessive screen time.
- **Key Initiatives**
  - **Adolescent Parenting Program** – Supports young parents in completing their education and preparing for parenthood.
  - **Dolly Parton Imagination Library** – Previously state-funded book program for children birth to age five; state funding ended on February 1st, but grant efforts are underway to continue locally.
  - **Family Engagement Centers** – Locations in Franklin, Vance, and Granville Counties providing hands-on learning materials for families.
  - **Kindergarten Transition Program** – Prepares children for school readiness.
  - **Father Involvement Program** – Encourages active participation of fathers or father figures in child development.
- **Community Involvement & Funding**
  - **Little Free Libraries** – Available in Granville County at the Athletic Park.
  - **Funding Sources** – Primarily state-funded, with some federal grants and community fundraising.
  - **PBS Kids Ambassador** – Dr. Frederickson represents Granville County, collaborating with the library system to promote educational programming.
- **Fundraising Events**
  - **Time Out Tuesday** – A community event raising funds for Smart Start.
  - **Ducky Derby** – Another fundraising initiative supporting early childhood programs.
- **Closing & Appreciation**
  - Thanked the Board for its $5,000 contribution, which supports staff training, educational materials, and community programs.
  - Provided informational materials and small gifts.
  - Encouraged follow-up questions and directed inquiries to Executive Director Dr. Tony Cozart.

Commissioner Cozart thanked Dr. Frederickson for presenting and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to address the needs of young children. He emphasized the importance of reaching children not enrolled in childcare centers, as they may start kindergarten at a disadvantage. He noted that while most Smart Start funding is restricted to specific uses, the County's contribution provides valuable flexibility. He concluded by thanking the Board for its support.

<u>Board Received Granville Vance Public Health 50th Anniversary Annual Report.</u>
Dr. Lisa Harrison, director, presented on behalf of Granville Vance Public Health. She distributed copies of the '50th Anniversary Annual Report' to the Board and spoke from the presentation included in the agenda packet. Key points included:

- **Granville Vance Public Health 50th Anniversary**
  - Celebrating 50 years of service in 2024.
  - Highlights from the State of the County Health Report.
- **Community Health Priorities**
  - Access to healthcare.
  - Mental health and substance use treatment.
  - Youth engagement for safety.
- **2023 Key Achievements**
  - Expansion of school-based oral health programs.

    - State awards for excellence in maternal and child health services.
    - Launch of the **THRIVe Program**, a $4 million mental health initiative in schools.
    - HRSA confirmed continued funding for **THRIVe** through next year.
- **Leading Causes of Death in Granville County**
    - Cancer.
    - Heart disease and stroke.
    - Chronic lower respiratory diseases.
    - COVID-19 (2022-2023).
- **Health Disparities & Emerging Issues**
    - High diabetes prevalence in certain populations.
    - Housing and food insecurity impacting health outcomes.
    - Increased need for hepatitis C screening and treatment.
    - Recent initiative screened 15 people—9 tested positive for hepatitis C.
- **Public Health Workforce & Services**
    - Approximately 100 staff members across six buildings.
    - Services include environmental health, communicable disease, behavioral health, and primary care.

Dr. Lisa Harrison responded to Commissioner May's inquiry regarding state and federal contracts and funding, stating that, at that time, there were no direct cutbacks affecting staff or services. However, she noted that the funding for their hepatitis C bridge counselor, which amounted to $37,000, would end after the current fiscal year due to a federal-level cut by the CDC. She mentioned that they were seeking alternative grant funding to replace it.

Dr. Harrison also discussed the March 15th federal funding deadline, explaining that it could impact Medicaid-related decisions. She clarified that Medicaid funds services rather than providing direct payments to individuals, emphasizing that local hospitals, the health department, and federally qualified health centers relied on Medicaid to sustain their operations. She acknowledged ongoing advocacy efforts from the hospital association and other organizations, expressing hope that they would continue serving Medicaid patients.

Commissioner May asked Dr. Harrison to briefly summarize the potential Medicaid funding risks and their state-level implications. Dr. Harrison explained that North Carolina received substantial Medicaid funding, which supported the local health department in three primary ways:

1. **Fee-for-Service** – Billing Medicaid for services provided, such as hepatitis C screenings and treatments.
2. **Cost Settlement** – Year-end adjustments to cover additional efforts required to serve Medicaid patients.
3. **Per Member Per Month Payments** – Medicaid payments for care management services for pregnant women and children aged zero to five.

She stated that Medicaid funding directly supported approximately 37 positions within the local health department, including those in Henderson and Oxford.

Commissioner May reiterated that federal funding decisions would influence the state's responsibility to cover Medicaid costs due to its shared funding structure. Dr. Harrison confirmed this, adding that such decisions had local impacts, particularly on jobs. When asked for her perspective on the potential effects, she noted that while it was difficult to predict specifics, ongoing discussions suggested potential work requirements for Medicaid eligibility and possible cuts. She also highlighted that the North Carolina Dental Association was advocating for increased Medicaid reimbursement rates, which had remained unchanged since 2008.

Commissioner May referenced discussions from the Board's retreat, noting that 27% of Granville County's population was served by Medicaid.

Commissioner May inquired specifically about cancer rates in Granville County, asking what factors contributed to them. Dr. Lisa Harrison explained that multiple factors influenced cancer rates, with the region's history as a tobacco-growing area being a notable environmental contributor. She stated that Granville County's cancer rates were in line with other counties and noted that Vance County had a slightly higher rate. She also mentioned that residents frequently contacted her for more information about cancer data and that she often directed them to the state Center for Health Statistics for additional details.

Commissioner May then asked if lifestyle choices and overall health behaviors were contributing factors. Dr. Harrison confirmed that lifestyle and health choices played a role but emphasized that both genetic and environmental factors influenced cancer rates. He noted that distinguishing between these factors required large-scale studies.

Commissioner Cozart thanked Dr. Harrison for her leadership, acknowledging her previous service as a board member at Smart Start. He commended her and her team for their active involvement in various interagency meetings and for consistently being present in the community. He expressed appreciation for their collaboration, which had allowed for the leveraging of resources to benefit local initiatives. Additionally, Commissioner Cozart highlighted the expanded dental services mentioned on page seven of the report, emphasizing their importance and thanking Dr. Harrison and her team for making such a vital service available to the community.

Commissioner Jay expressed gratitude to Dr. Lisa Harrison, praising her as the best director in North Carolina for her extensive knowledge of statewide and nationwide developments. Dr. Harrison thanked him for his service on the Granville Vance District Board of Health. Chair Gooch also thanked Dr. Harrison, acknowledging her contributions both within her role and beyond, particularly her work with the Opioid Advisory Committee. Dr. Harrison expressed her appreciation, stating that she values public health service and enjoys it every day.

Commissioner May asked Dr. Harrison for clarification on cancer rates in Granville County, inquiring whether they were higher or lower compared to other counties. Dr. Harrison explained that there were no significant differences in cancer rates in the region. She emphasized the complexity of understanding cancer causes, noting factors like lifestyle choices, genetics, environmental influences, and the history of tobacco use. She assured the Board that investigations into cancer causes continue.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No one came forward for public comments.

SHERIFF MATTERS

At the beginning of the meeting, Board moved item number 9, Retirement of K9 Lena, to the consent agenda.

Board Approved Request to Purchase Body Cameras

Sheriff Fountain addressed the Board regarding the purchase of body cameras for the Granville County Sheriff's Office. He proposed acquiring 15 body cameras using a bank system, where the seven on-duty patrol deputies would use the cameras while the remaining units remained in the charging bank. At the end of each shift, deputies would return their cameras to the bank, allowing data to be downloaded before the next shift used them.

He stated that the initial purchase would be funded through asset forfeiture money, with plans to expand the program to outfit the entire agency as additional funds became available. Cameras phased out from patrol use would be reassigned to the Special Operations Unit and SWAT/SRT teams. Sheriff Fountain emphasized the importance of body cameras in ensuring transparency and accountability for both deputies and citizens.

He requested that the County provide financial support to sustain the program beyond the first year, specifically assisting with funding for years two through five.

Commissioner May asked Sheriff Fountain if asset forfeiture funds could be used for recurring expenses, noting that she understood these funds could be used only in the first year but not for subsequent years. Sheriff Fountain confirmed that asset forfeiture funds could not be used for recurring contracts. County Attorney Wrenn clarified that asset forfeiture money is a one-time expenditure and should not be relied upon for ongoing expenses to avoid encouraging law enforcement agencies to "police for profit."

Commissioner May then confirmed that the Sheriff's Office would fund the first year of expenses, and future years would be covered by the Sheriff's budget. Sheriff Fountain agreed with this plan. Commissioner May also inquired whether the Sheriff's Office currently had policies in place for body camera use, to which Sheriff Fountain confirmed they did.

Commissioner May emphasized the importance of considering the budget implications for the following year, particularly given that other departments would be asked to cut 5% from their budgets. He stressed the need to ensure that the cost of the body camera system could be absorbed within the Sheriff's budget without increasing overall expenses.

Chair Gooch raised concerns about a shortfall in detention funds, specifically regarding costs for juvenile detention, and suggested that the Sheriff's budget could potentially cover these costs, as the County faces a $500,000 shortfall. Sheriff Fountain agreed and proposed using funds generated from the commissary or any leftover funds from the current fiscal year to help cover these expenses.

Motioned by Commissioner Mark Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, and unanimously carried, Board approved entering a five-year (59-month) contract with Axon Enterprise, Inc. for the purchase and maintenance of a 15-bundle Body Camera System in the total amount of $137,111.80. The first payment of $33,994.01, covering Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 (April 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026), will be paid in Fiscal Year 2025 using funds from the U.S. Department of Justice Asset Forfeiture account (#51-4311-000). Funding for the remaining four years of the contract (Fiscal Years 2027–2030) will be requested as a line item in the Sheriff's Office budget. The Board also authorized the County Manager to execute the contract upon final review by the County Attorney.

Board Approved Request to Purchase In-Car Camera System
Sheriff Fountain requested approval to purchase 40 new in-car cameras for the Granville County Sheriff's Office fleet. This request followed a recent incident involving a chase with stolen vehicles, which highlighted the need to equip all patrol and emergency response vehicles with in-car cameras for community protection, agency liability, and transparency. The cameras would initially be installed in existing vehicles, with future vehicles being outfitted through the fleet management system. Sheriff Fountain proposed using asset forfeiture funds to cover the first year’s cost, with the Sheriff’s Office budget absorbing the costs for years two through five.

Commissioner May asked Sheriff Fountain to explain the value of investing in body cameras and in-car cameras, highlighting the technology gap in Granville County compared to other law enforcement agencies. Sheriff Fountain explained that the cameras automatically activate when the blue lights are turned on, ensuring transparency and accountability. He emphasized that the cameras have a 93% exoneration rate, protecting deputies from allegations of misconduct. Sheriff Fountain shared an example of a recent car chase where in-car camera footage helped avoid litigation by proving the Sheriff's Office's actions were appropriate. He also noted that the cloud-based system allows automatic access for the District Attorney's office, ensuring transparency in cases involving use-of-force or other incidents.

Commissioner Williford asked about the operation of the in-car cameras, specifically regarding situations when the deputy does not turn on the blue lights. He inquired whether the camera would still activate in those cases.

Sheriff Fountain explained that the in-car cameras are equipped with technology that ensures they record continuously, even when the blue lights are not turned on. He added that the body cameras also record continuously, but deputies must manually activate them. The sheriff further clarified that the body cameras are cloud-based, allowing for easy retrieval of footage.

He emphasized that the Sheriff's Office is implementing a policy that requires deputies to activate their cameras in various situations, such as when stopping a vehicle, exiting their patrol car, or engaging in law enforcement activities like knocking on doors. The sheriff assured the Board that deputies would be held accountable for adhering to these policies, aiming to avoid any liability for the County. Additionally, he noted that while some older cameras may have issues, the new cameras would help ensure consistent compliance with the policy.

Commissioner May asked Sheriff Fountain to explain how the in-car camera system would tie into the accreditation process for the Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Fountain responded that the accreditation process involves meeting specific requirements, including having up-to-date policies and procedures, as well as technology like body cameras and in-car cameras. The Sheriff's Office has been working with Belinda Pounds, Rob Bailess, and Chief Clements on the accreditation process. While they have not yet started the formal accreditation process, they are doing the necessary pre-work and have received a pre-audit from the state, which included recommendations. He highlighted that having proper technology will serve as a foundation for providing factual information to the community. Commissioner May mentioned that part of the strategic plan includes the Sheriff's Office working toward accreditation in both law enforcement and detention areas, and this funding aligns with that plan.

Sheriff Fountain added that the jail recently passed a state inspection with no deficiencies, noting the success.

Commissioner May also mentioned that he had requested to participate in a ride-along and tour of the jail to better understand its operations and encourage other commissioners to do the same to better communicate with constituents.

Motioned by Commissioner Robert Williford, seconded by Commissioner Mark Griffin, and unanimously carried, Board approved entering a five-year (59-month) contract with Axon Enterprise, Inc. for the purchase and maintenance of 40 in-car camera systems in the total amount of $411,251.68. The first payment of $82,250.33, covering Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026 (April 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026), will be paid in Fiscal Year 2025 using funds from the U.S. Department of Justice Asset Forfeiture account (#51-4311-000). Funding for the remaining four years of the contract (Fiscal Years 2027–2030) will be requested as a line item in the Sheriff's

Office budget. The Board also authorized the County Manager to execute the contract upon final review by the County Attorney.

Sheriff Fountain Updated Board
Sheriff Fountain addressed the Board, stating that the Sheriff's Office is currently investigating a use of force incident involving three deputies. He clarified that no information could be released until the investigation, involving the County Attorney, the District Attorney's Office, and the State Bureau of Investigation (SBI), is completed. He assured the community that all relevant information, including body camera footage, will be released in accordance with the law once the investigation concludes. He emphasized that the investigation is being taken seriously, with assistance from the Durham County Sheriff's Office, and the department is committed to cooperating fully. He reassured everyone that transparency will be maintained throughout the process.

TAX MATTERS

Board Denied Approval of Interest Reversal Request
Tax Administrator presented a request from Charles W. Kelly IV to reverse the interest applied to his 2024 tax bill. Mr. Kelly mailed a payment on November 4, 2024, but the check was intercepted and never received by the tax department. On December 12, 2024, Wells Fargo notified him of a fraudulent check, and upon further investigation, a second fraudulent check with the same check number was found. On January 25, 2025, Mr. Kelly received a delinquent notice and realized his check to the tax department had not cleared.

Tax Administrator explained that, under North Carolina General Statutes, the Board could not waive interest unless there was a clerical error or an illegal tax. Given the circumstances, the Tax Administrator recommended not approving the request to waive interest.

When asked to comment on the matter, County Attorney Wrenn noted that while the amount requested for forgiveness was relatively small, the same principles would apply to any such request under similar circumstances. He reminded the Board that under North Carolina General Statute 105-380(c), any tax released, refunded, or compromised in violation of the statute could be recovered from any member of the governing body who voted for it. This recovery could be pursued through civil action by any resident of the taxing unit, and the plaintiff could be awarded reasonable attorney’s fees if the tax was recovered. He emphasized the importance of following the law, as failure to do so could result in significant consequences.

Commissioner May sought clarification, asking if there was any room for variance in the situation or if the Board would be at risk of liability if they proceeded without statutory authority. County Attorney Wrenn responded that there was no statutory authority for the Board to forgive or refund the tax. If the Board acted without such authority, the law held its members personally liable and provided a mechanism for taxpayers to sue the Board and recover reasonable attorney’s fees.

Commissioner May struggled with the situation, noting that the individual had done everything he could but was still faced with $105 in additional interest. He struggled with the fact that the law did not allow for a common-sense decision and asked to hear from other board members before making a motion.

Commissioner Williford agreed, stating that the individual had followed the process correctly, but acknowledged that there was no statutory authority for the Board to act, and the members would be personally liable if they did.

Tax Administrator Short confirmed that the lack of statutory authority was correct.

Commissioner May asked the County Attorney for his recommendation.

When asked for his recommendation, County Attorney Wrenn recommended denying the request, explaining that while the law was harsh, it was necessary to ensure the tax system was administered fairly and impartially.

Chair Gooch acknowledged the struggle but reiterated the Tax Administrator's recommendation not to approve reversing the interest due to the lack of statutory authority.

Motioned by Commissioner Russ May, seconded by Commissioner Mark Griffin, and unanimous carried, after reviewing the request to reverse $105.46 in interest on a 2024 tax bill due to the taxpayer's check being intercepted and cashed by an unauthorized party, Board denied approval of the request, citing a lack of statutory authority to reverse the interest.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT MATTERS

Board Tabled Fire Commissioner Recommendation

Ken Reeves stood in for Jason, who was unavailable due to illness. He provided an update on the part-time firefighter reimbursement program. Initially, the program allowed one firefighter per department, Monday through Friday, for a maximum of 10 hours per day and 50 hours per week, with a maximum reimbursement of $18 per hour, totaling $50,400 per department. A change was implemented a few months ago to allow two firefighters to work on a given day if other days were not covered while keeping the same maximum reimbursement and hour limits. This change helped improve response times, with many departments achieving an average of three minutes, which was considered very good for volunteer fire departments.

Andy Culbreth, Chair of the Fire Commission, presented a recommendation to modify the current reimbursement policy. The proposal aimed to lift the 50-hour weekly restriction and remove limits on the number of firefighters per shift while maintaining the current funding level. The changes would allow fire departments to be reimbursed for more hours and firefighters, but the 10-hour daily limit, $18 hourly rate, and $50,400 annual cap would remain unchanged.

Ken Reeves explained that, due to the tiered payment structure (with firefighter pay ranging from $15 to $18 per hour), some departments were not reaching the full $50,400 limit. The proposal to lift the 50-hour cap would allow departments to use additional hours for staffing needs, particularly for tasks requiring more than one firefighter, such as hose testing and equipment maintenance. This change would also help departments prepare for upcoming ISO evaluations.

Commissioner May inquired if the necessary information was printed out. Andy Culbreth responded that he did not think so. Commissioner May, unable to find it either, noted the importance of having that piece of information available for the meeting and continued, asking the Chair if he could proceed with questions. Commissioner May then asked about the graph and the staff numbers, observing that many departments were operating around the 70% staffing range. He pointed out that the key question needing answering was how removing the personnel cap would ensure daily staffing at the volunteer stations.

Ken Reeves clarified that removing the personnel cap would not directly increase the number of firefighters assigned daily, but it would allow for more work to be done and help ensure firefighters arrive on the scene faster by having more flexibility with their hours. He explained that they currently had two firefighters available daily, as long as the hours fit within the 50-

hour weekly limit. Commissioner May acknowledged this but wanted to know how removing the cap would help to ensure daily coverage at the stations. Ken Reeves responded that one of the challenges they faced was training recruits, as they could not hire volunteers as regular employees. The flexibility from lifting the cap would allow them to have two people working per day, which could also be used for training purposes, thus helping them fill more shifts with trained personnel.

Commissioner Williford asked for clarification, noting that Ken had mentioned a potential scenario with four firefighters on a Friday. Ken Reeves confirmed this and explained that, under the proposal, if the department had leftover funds within their budget, they could use them to pay for extra shifts, potentially adding more personnel to the station on a day like Friday. However, he also highlighted the challenge for departments with tight budgets, where the remaining funds might not be sufficient to cover additional staff on Saturdays. Commissioner May followed up, asking for further clarification on the reasoning behind staffing more on weekdays versus weekends, as the volunteers' response on weekends was often more readily available. Andy Culbreth explained that the original staffing plan focused on weekdays because that's when the departments needed the most help. He mentioned that on weekends, volunteers were more likely to be available to respond to calls.

Ken Reeves further explained that, in cases of storms or other emergencies, the added flexibility could allow them to staff more trucks quickly and respond faster. Commissioner Jay asked if each fire department had two paid firefighters from Monday to Friday, to which Ken Reeves clarified that they only had one slot per day for a firefighter, with a cap of 50 hours per week. Commissioner May responded, confirming that the budget initially allowed for one firefighter per day, and the proposal was modified to allow for two, but there were concerns about the budget remaining the same.

Chair Gooch voiced his concerns about the language in the proposal not aligning with the explanations provided. While the intent was clear, he expressed that the written policy was vague and didn't fully capture the explanations given during the meeting. Commissioner May asked if the Board members had read the full background information, as it was important for understanding the proposal. Ken Reeves read the background aloud, explaining that the fire departments had expressed concerns about unused funds and wanted to lift the 50-hour weekly cap to provide more flexibility in staffing. The fire commission had recommended modifying the policy to remove restrictions on the number of firefighters per shift while maintaining the current funding level.

Chair Gooch acknowledged the clarity of the explanations but noted that the written proposal didn't align with that level of clarity, creating potential confusion. Commissioner May posed the central question of how removing the cap would improve daily staffing, as the budget still only provided for two firefighters per day. He also raised concerns about how much funding would be needed for part-time positions if the cap was removed and the budget opened up for more flexibility.

Commissioner Williford asked about the original plan for leftover funds. Andy Culbreth explained that any unused funds were meant to go back into the general fire tax fund, which would help build a fund balance for future use. Commissioner Williford expressed concern that lifting the cap could reduce the fund balance, as it would allow the funds to be spent more quickly. Andy Culbreth clarified that the unused funds were part of an effort to build up a balance for the fire tax fund, but he acknowledged that some departments had not utilized all available funds, such as those for the first responder program.

Motioned by Commissioner Mark Griffin, seconded by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, and unanimously carried, after considering the Fire Commission's recommendation to modify the current firefighter reimbursement policy, Board tabled the item for further clarification and discussion.

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORT

County Manager's Report
County Manager Cummings said that he did not have any items to report.

COUNTY ATTORNEY'S REPORT

County Attorney's Report
County Attorney Wrenn said that he did not have any items to report.

PRESENTATIONS BY COUNTY BOARD MEMBERS

Commissioner Jay expressed his appreciation for the 10th Annual Veterans Appreciation Event, which was held on Saturday, March 1, 2025, at South Granville High School at 2:00 p.m.

Commissioner Williford shared that he participated in Read Across America for the first time, which he found to be an incredibly fulfilling experience.

Commissioner Griffin attended the 10th Annual Veterans Appreciation event at South Granville High School on Saturday and was pleased with the turnout of people supporting veterans. He highlighted the importance of showing appreciation for those who have served to protect the freedoms enjoyed in the country. Additionally, Griffin mentioned attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new concession stand at South Granville High School, noting the investment made in the facility and its potential to benefit students for many years.

Commissioner Cozart briefly remarked on the Antioch Fire Department's ongoing fundraising efforts, expressing his appreciation for their hard work. Although he could not attend the Veterans Appreciation event on Saturday, he conveyed his gratitude to the veterans and commended the committee for their excellent work each year, specifically thanking Commissioner May for his role as liaison.

Board Held Appointment to Granville Health System Board of Trustees
Commissioner May nominated Jacob Rogers for appointment to the Granville Health System Board of Trustees on behalf of Commissioner Karan. Commissioner Williford seconded the nomination. County Attorney Wrenn asked whether Commissioner Karan had officially resigned from the hospital board, and Commissioner May confirmed that he had, noting that Commissioner Karan had informed the board members. Based on the County Attorney's confirmation that the seat was vacant, the motion was put to a vote and passed unanimously.

Board revisited the matter following legal advisement as the Board reviewed how further changes would affect the number of voting seats held by Commissioners. To ensure that all commissioners, including Commissioner Karan (who was not present), had an opportunity to discuss the matter, the Board voted to rescind the nomination and revisit the issue at a future meeting. The decision was not a reflection on the nominee but was made to allow for further clarification and due diligence.

Motioned by Commissioner Russ May, seconded by Commissioner Robert Williford, and unanimously carried, Board rescinded the appointment of Jacob Rogers to the Granville Health System Board of Trustees and held appointments to a future meeting upon further review of the bylaws by the County Attorney.

Board Presentations Resumed

Commissioner May thanked Commissioners for attending the Veterans Appreciation event, noting the significant turnout, particularly of Vietnam veterans, and acknowledged the great work of the Veterans Affairs Committee. He emphasized the importance of their work for the over 3,000 veterans in the county. He also addressed the ongoing concern with PFAS and the SGWASA situation in the community. He shared that he had met with representatives from various offices, including Congressmember Brad Knott's office, Senator Ted Budd's office, and Representative Thom Tillis's office, to discuss the issue and seek funding and support. He highlighted that the board is actively engaged, working on behalf of the county's residents, and is in communication with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and other water systems. He reassured the public that the concerns were being heard and not ignored. He also mentioned the importance of feedback from the Fire Commission, urging commissioners to guide funding areas to assist in the Fire Commission's decision-making process.

Commissioner Jay added that he met with Christie Simmons from Congressman Knott's office last week to discuss railroad developments in Oxford.

Chair Gooch shared that he attended the Veterans' ceremony at South Granville on Saturday, which was a deeply emotional and moving experience for him, as it focused on honoring Vietnam War veterans. He reflected on how many of these veterans are aging, noting that he missed serving by a few years, as he was 18 in September 1972 when the war was winding down. He expressed great respect for the veterans, having heard their stories over the years. While he was asked to make opening remarks, he kept them brief out of respect, feeling that he hadn't "earned the right" to speak to them, as they were the true heroes. He appreciated the ceremony and its significance.

ANY OTHER MATTERS

There were no other matters for open session.

CLOSED SESSION

Motioned by Commissioner Tony W, Cozart seconded by Commissioner Robert Williford, and unanimously carried, the Board entered into closed session at 9:06 p.m. for attorney-client matters as allowed by G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3).

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

Motioned by Commissioner Robert Williford seconded by Commissioner Zelodis Jay, and unanimously carried, Board returned to open session at 9:49 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Commissioner Robert Willford, seconded by Commissioner Tony W. Cozart, and unanimously carried, Board adjourned at 9:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Evans
Clerk to the Board