GRANVILLE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
February 21, 2025
GRANVILLE EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTER
4185 US Highway 15 South, Oxford, North Carolina
ANNUAL RETREAT

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

County Manager Drew Cummings
Deputy County Manager Korena Weichel
County Attorney James C. Wrenn, Jr.
Finance Director Jennifer Baird

CALL TO ORDER

At 9:00 a.m. Chair Jimmy Gooch called the meeting to order. Commissioner Karan had the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES UPDATE – DIRECTOR SCOTT PHILLIPS

Development Services Scott Phillips provided an update that covered three main areas: Building Inspection operations, Capital Projects status, and Facilities Maintenance needs.

Building Inspections

- Director Phillips reported the department had seven staff members, with recent hires having acquired most of their level one certification.
- Building permits showed a substantial increase from 2023 to 2024, primarily in residential areas.
- Revenue totaled over $900,000 in 2024, up from $800,000 the previous year.
- The department performed 7,160 site inspections in 2024, up from 6,051 in 2023.
- The iWorq Digital permit submittal platform was launched, with the first digital permit recently submitted.
- The department was transitioning from 2018 to 2024 North Carolina building codes, with full implementation scheduled for July 1, 2025.

Projects Update

- The Triangle North Granville utility infrastructure project was completed with the 16-inch water line installation finished under budget by $98,000.
- The Orange Street Community Center roof replacement project was ready for bidding in March with an estimated cost of $85,000.
- The Hunt Street building demolition was completed for $80,000, slightly over budget due to additional asbestos abatement needs.
- Walking trail repairs at Granville Athletic Park were completed in July 2024 for $139,000.

Future Projects

- G. C. Hawley site abatement and demolition was scheduled for fiscal year 2025-2026 with an estimated cost of $1.5 million.
- Commissioners discussed the possibility of saving some structures at Hawley for potential community use.
- A space needs assessment and master planning for County facilities was being prepared, with a Request for Quotes (RFQ) planned for release in March 2025.
- Director Phillips emphasized the need for additional Facilities Maintenance staff, noting only three people were maintaining over 350,000 square feet of building space.

Discussion Points

- Commissioners suggested the potential consolidation of County services into a single, central location to improve citizen convenience, highlighting the value of a "one-stop" facility where residents could efficiently access all County services.
- Commissioners expressed interest in reviewing County-owned properties to determine which might be sold.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE UPDATE – SHERIFF ROBERT FOUNTAIN

Sheriff Fountain provided a comprehensive update on Sheriff's Office operations, highlighting several key achievements and challenges.

Staffing and Operations

- Sheriff Fountain reported the Sheriff's Office was nearly fully staffed with only two vacancies across both divisions.
- All Law Enforcement Officers were certified, with one person currently in Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET).
- Sheriff's Office maintained seven Deputies per rotation, divided into South, Middle, and North Districts.
- Response times have decreased due to staffing pattern changes.

Detention Facility

- The jail had generated $207,017.49 to date in FY 24-25 from housing Federal inmates (compared to $337,000 last year).
- Vance County was in discussions about potentially leasing space in the Granville County jail after inspecting the downtown facility.

Budget Concerns

- Sheriff Fountain discussed challenges with Juvenile Detention costs, noting that arrests by any agency in the County became the Sheriff's Office's responsibility financially.
- Medical costs for inmates were a significant budget concern, as these expenses were unpredictable.
- The Sheriff's Office implemented a policy requiring arresting agencies to have intoxicated individuals cleared by Granville Medical Center before bringing them to the detention facility.
- Commissioners expressed concerns about delayed invoicing from the state creating budget challenges.

Technology and Special Operations

- The Sheriff's Office operated two drones and was looking to expand its drone fleet.

- Three staff members were certified or in training to operate drones through the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).
- Deputies successfully conducted dignitary protection for Congressman Don Davis in coordination with US Capitol Police.
- Body cameras were discussed, with clarification that the first year would be covered by asset Forfeiture Funds.

Emergency Response

- Sheriff Fountain acknowledged his team's work during recent inclement weather, including staff who stayed at the jail to ensure operations continued.
- Deputies assisted with chainsaw work to clear roads during weather emergencies.
- The Sheriff's Office coordinated with Emergency Management in preparation for weather events.

HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE – DIRECTOR ANGELA MILES

Director Miles provided an update from Human Resources (HR), highlighting the department's activities for 2024-2025.

HR Department Overview:

- Operated with a staff of three serving over 400 full/part-time employees
- Maintained compliance with labor laws, administered county benefits, developed compensation plans, and managed personnel policies

Strategic Initiatives to Remain a Preferred Employer:

- Conducted ongoing review of salary and benefits to remain competitive with neighboring counties
- Increased recruitment efforts through various job boards, social media, Indeed, and Listservs
- Offered training for employees and leaders to promote internal growth opportunities
- Increased 401k employer match from 2% to 3%, with 150 employees participating (51% contributing 3% or higher)

Vacancy Report:

- 27% of positions were filled within 30 days
- 59% of remaining positions were filled within 60 days
- Average posting time decreased from 11 days to 5 days since hiring a Recruitment Specialist

Workplace Climate Survey Results:

- First-ever employee survey was conducted in January 2024
- Key findings included: employee exhaustion, compensation dissatisfaction, trust issues with leadership related to communication, and increased citizen incivility
- County Administration and Department Heads implemented changes to address survey results
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New Initiatives:

- Proposed six (6) weeks of paid parental leave for eligible employees, to be presented to the Board in June with an effective date of July 1, 2025
- Proposed Classification and Pay study (estimated cost $40,000) to ensure competitive salaries, with implementation targeted for fiscal year 2026-2027

- Noted Granville County was approximately 10% behind Durham and Wake County in salaries

HR Director Miles indicated they were working to revise the work-from-home policy, which was initially created during COVID-19.

Discussion Points:

- A question was raised about the number one factor contributing to turnover. Director Miles responded that it was a combination of factors, including involuntary terminations and family-related moves, and that incomplete exit interviews made it difficult to identify a single dominant reason.
- Clarification was requested on whether turnover numbers included all departments. Director Miles confirmed that they did, including the Sheriff's Office and Detention Center.
- It was asked whether the County's turnover rate was comparable to similar counties. Director Miles stated that neighboring counties also experienced a turnover rate of around 20%.
- A question was posed regarding whether positions vacant for 90 days were still being actively advertised. Director Miles confirmed that they were, with postings refreshed to maintain visibility.

GRANVILLE HEALTH SYSTEM & EMS UPDATE - CEO ADAM MCCONNELL

Granville Health System CEO Adam McConnell provided a comprehensive update on the health system's operations, highlighting staffing improvements, facility upgrades, and service expansions. The presentation covered the system's current status, recent achievements, and plans for healthcare delivery in Granville County.

Staffing and Personnel Updates:

- GHS reported approximately 650 employees, an increase from about 610 FTEs previously
- The health system had onboarded numerous full-time positions across departments
- A leadership team was completed with new executives: Jamie Purvis (CFO), Susan Solomich (Executive Director, Ambulatory and Outpatient Practices), and Kelly Lucas (CIO)

Facility Improvements and Programs:

- The Hospitalist Program was transitioned in-house under Dr. Richard Pacca as Medical Director
- Fluoroscopy equipment was replaced with plans to upgrade the entire imaging department
- A new Ambulatory Surgery Facility was developed in a purchased building
- The foundation raised over $100,000 to build a lobby for the Labor and Delivery Unit
- The health system received a certificate of need approval for In-patient Dialysis Services

Service Statistics:

- Emergency Room: 23,000 patient visits
- Operating Room: 4,200 visits
- Imaging Department: 37,000 studies
- All practices combined: 66,000 visits (with 21,000 at Oxford location)

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Updates:
- 8% growth year-to-year in calls and transports
- Eight positions were posted for an additional EMS ambulance
- A long-term capital planning process for EMS was completed, providing a 10-year outlook
- EMS services had successfully negotiated to be in-network with commercial insurance payers

Community Initiatives:
- Medical school affiliations were established, including with Campbell University's Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine program
- The Granville Health System Foundation restarted the Ambulance Chase fundraiser and held its first Gala in four years
- The Harold Sherman Adult Day Center continued providing respite care with grant funding
- The foundation established the Gary Bowman Departmental Foundation Grant

CEO McConnell noted that the hospital was in a strong financial position, able to pay competitive salaries, and committed to remaining a county-owned hospital for years to come.

WORKING LUNCH

The Board commenced the working lunch, with the subsequent presentation beginning at 1:10 p.m.

SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATE – DIRECTOR LATOYA TOUSSAINT

LaToya Toussaint, Director of the Department of Social Services, provided an update on the Department of Social Services, accompanied by Deputy Director Vaness Taylor and Business/Fiscal Officer Megan Elliott.

Department Overview:
- Director Toussaint explained that DSS provides state and federally mandated services that are County administered
- The County is required to provide matching funds for these services
- Services include: Benefits Administration (Medicaid, SNAP), Child Protection, Adult Services, and Child Support

Staffing and Operations:
- DSS had 110 full-time positions with 16 vacancies at the time of the report
- 12 of these vacancies were in the Medicaid Department, which generates significant revenue
- The department was operating across three locations in Oxford and Butner

Key Priorities:
- Filling vacancies, particularly in the Medicaid Department
- Increasing fiscal and programmatic accountability
- Improving technology and efficiency
- Developing local policies and standard operating procedures
- Building a positive employee culture

Technology Challenges

- Granville County was one of only 12 counties in North Carolina still using paper-based systems
- Director Toussaint noted that implementing electronic systems would be 50% reimbursed by the state
- The state was implementing a new child welfare information system that would require technological upgrades

Legislative Updates

- Changes to kinship care requirements were discussed
- New eligibility audits and timeliness requirements were implemented by the state
- Failure to meet performance standards could result in Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)

Financial Information

- In previous years, DSS brought in about 63-65% of expenditures as revenue
- Due to staffing shortages, projected revenue was expected to be 53-55% of expenditures

Safety Concerns

- The expansion request focused on safety improvements
- Staff expressed concerns about feeling unsafe in agency locations
- Requested improvements included security monitoring systems, cameras, partitions, and panic buttons

FINANCE OFFICE UPDATE – DIRECTOR JENNIFER BAIRD

Finance Director Jennifer Baird presented the Finance Office update.

Staffing and Achievements:

- Successfully hired and onboarded a new Assistant Finance Director and a Finance Technician
- Director Baird became a Certified Local Government Finance Officer through the UNC School of Government
- Successfully submitted the FY24 Annual Comprehensive Financial Reports for the county, Tourism Development Authority (TDA), and South Granville Memorial Garden Board of Trustees

Audit Results and Improvements:

- The County received a good audit with only minor findings related to:
  - Credit card internal controls
  - Timely closure of capital projects
  - Budget violation related to new GASB lease requirements
- The Finance Office implemented several process improvements, including:
  - Document scanning for better accessibility and transparency
  - Remote and night deposit functionality, saving 3-5 hours per week

Financial Corrections:

- Corrected an accounting error regarding a loan to the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund
- Worked with a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) Consultant to review financials with no major red flags identified

Capital Investment Plan:

- Created a new model for the Capital Investment Plan (CIP)
- Established a separate department for debt service in the general fund to improve tracking and reporting

COUNTY MANAGER UPDATE – COUNTY MANAGER DREW CUMMINGS

County Manager Drew Cummings provided a retrospective update on County accomplishments and challenges.

Key Accomplishments

- **Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)**: Substantial work was completed over the past 15-18 months, though not yet fully adopted
- **Finance Department**: Successfully rebuilt staff including a new assistant director, CPA position, and finance tech
- **Property Revaluation**: Completed the revaluation process despite challenges; lessons learned were being incorporated for future improvements
- **DSS Leadership**: Strengthened leadership team produced positive results and improving county operations
- **Fire Commission**: Made significant progress in the first years of the Fire Tax implementation:
    - All departments were under contract
    - Improved budgeting and planning
    - Completed first round of financial procedures reviews
    - Revised funding formulas to better meet needs
    - Response times dropped significantly in departments using daytime firefighters

- **New Department Heads**: Filled positions including Interim Animal Control Director and new Cooperative Extension Director
- **Fleet Management**: Continued transition to Enterprise Fleet Management with staff driving newer, more fuel-efficient, safer vehicles without increased costs
- **Triangle North Business Park**: Successfully accepted into the state select site readiness program

Future Priorities

- Modest employee pay adjustments to address inflation concerns
- Additional 1% contribution to employee 401(k) plans
- Goal of no net increase in county positions

BUDGET PRIORITIZATION EXERCISE

David Schexnayder, Management Analyst, facilitated a budget prioritization exercise where Board members were asked to rank 11 items in order of priority.

The Exercise Process:

- Each Commissioner received 11 cards listing potential budget priorities
- Commissioners were asked to rank these from 1 to 11 in order of importance
- One additional write-in item was added: the Oxford Henderson Airport
- The exercise was designed to help staff understand the Board's priorities going forward

Key Details About the Exercise:

- Some items had rough dollar figures attached, though many were estimates

- Commissioners were encouraged to note their own dollar figure assumptions on cards if that influenced their ranking
- Commissioners were invited to discuss the merits of different priorities
- The results would be collected and analyzed to inform budget recommendations

Notable Items on the Priority List:

- County facilities and capital funding (including space needs analysis)
- School capital funding
- Oxford Henderson Airport (write-in item related to water line extension)
- G. C. Hawley Recreation Center (discussed extensively as a priority for southern Granville County)

BOARD-REQUESTED DISCUSSION ITEMS

Board discussed several key items that were requested by the Commissioners:

Oxford-Henderson Airport Funding

- Commissioner Williford provided an update on the Oxford-Henderson Airport's water line project
- The airport has previously received $500,000 through the state through efforts of former Representative Frank Sossamon, with $150,000 used for engineering
- Approximately $1 million in additional funding is still needed to complete the water line
- Without the water line, the airport cannot build new hangars with required sprinkler systems
- There are 49 planes/owners on a waiting list for hangar space
- Grant opportunities would be explored
- The airport is managed by an authority with representatives from Oxford, Henderson, and Vance County

G.C. Hawley Site Project

- Commissioners expressed strong support for moving forward with the Hawley School demolition and community center project
- Board discussed the need to serve southern Granville residents who have waited years for a community facility
- $2 million had been set aside since 2018 for a southern end project
- There was consensus among the Commissioners to proceed with abatement and demolition while continuing to look for possible grants.
- The project was envisioned as both a community meeting space and a recreation facility

Article 46 Sales Tax Discussion

- Commissioner Karan proposed pursuing the Article 46 quarter-cent sales tax
- Approximately half of North Carolina counties have already implemented this tax
- The current sales tax rate is 6.75%, which would increase to 7%
- Commissioners discussed the need for a PR campaign to explain how funds would be used
- Board noted that residents already pay this tax when shopping in neighboring counties

Fire Commission Budget

- Commissioner May provided an overview of fire department funding categories (operational, enhancement, grant, and first responder funding)

- Board discussed the evolution of part-time firefighter funding, which started as one firefighter for 50 hours weekly, then expanded to two firefighters
- Commissioners expressed concerns about maintaining the original vision of providing daily coverage
- The fire tax has increased from generating $1.2 million to $3.5 million since implementation
- Board discussed the need for better alignment between the commissioners, fire commission, and volunteer fire departments

Solid Waste Management in New Developments

- Commissioner Karan proposed requiring new subdivisions to include solid waste infrastructure
- The suggestion was to require dumpsters within new developments (e.g., two dumpsters per 100 homes)
- This approach could reduce pressure on existing convenience centers
- Commissioners noted the difficulty of finding land for new convenience centers and the rising costs of operating them

FOLLOW UP DISCUSSION

Commissioner May

- Expressed concern about traffic congestion from new developments and urged better planning and communication with municipalities and the Department of Transportation (DOT).
- Emphasized the importance of spending on needs rather than wants and applauded staff for tracking trends.
- Celebrated progress on the G.C. Hawley Recreation Center and acknowledged Commissioner Karan's long-term advocacy.
- Highlighted looming shortfalls in social services funding and stressed avoiding a tax increase.
- Urged the County Manager to balance the budget through strategic cuts and adjustments.
- Praised Finance Officer Jennifer Baird's presentation and expressed appreciation for County staff and analysts.
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Commissioner Karan

- Reflected positively on the County's current phase, noting growth and past challenges.
- Praised leadership for assembling a strong team and acknowledged necessary personnel changes.
- Voiced concern about other entities, such as the school system, making financial commitments that fall back on the County.
- Warned about future financial pressure if funding tiers change and state support decreases.
- Emphasized the County's limited authority in some services like fire protection, which still lead to public expectations.
- Recognized the difficulty of quasi-county responsibilities and affirmed unity among commissioners despite differing opinions.

Commissioner Jay

- Thanked presenters and municipalities for their input, noting common themes around growth.

- Emphasized the importance of proactive planning to stay ahead of growth-related challenges.
- Strongly supported avoiding any tax increases and expected the county manager to make it happen.
- Shared personal concerns about fire protection gaps in the Brassfield area and asked whether funds were being set aside for future coverage.
- Encouraged long-term financial planning and cautioned against spending all available resources now.
- Thanked Finance Officer Baird and county staff for informative presentations and retreat preparation.

Chair Gooch

- Thanked County Attorney Jim Wrenn for his valuable legal guidance and presence throughout the two-day meeting, acknowledging that his support, though often unspoken, was essential when needed.
- Thanked City of Creedmoor Commissioner Robert Way for attending.

ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Commissioner Robert Willford, seconded by Commissioner Zelodis Jay, and unanimously carried, Board adjourned at 4:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Evans
Clerk to the Board