

The Alleghany County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Wednesday, June 23, 2010, at 6:30pm in the Board Meeting Room of the County Administration Building, 348 South Main Street, Sparta, North Carolina. The purpose of this meeting is for budget discussions.

Present: Chair Ken Richardson, Vice-Chair Randy Miller, Commissioner Doug Murphy, Commissioner Milly Richardson, Commissioner Steve Roten, County Manager Don Adams and Clerk to the Board Karen Evans.

Chair Ken Richardson called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Janis Fender, Council on Aging, talked about how they have cut their services during the last couple of years. She gave examples of how additional cuts will impact Council on Aging.

Commissioner Doug Murphy and Janis Fender talked about seeking outside grant sources, which she stated she has written grants in the past and hasn't been successful.

Chair Ken Richardson asked will cuts result in loss of services.

Janis Fender answered yes, and they have already been closed on Fridays for the last two years. She explained that she doesn't think they can get a waiver from the State to close an additional day.

Commissioner Doug Murphy and Janis Fender talked about looking to see if there are grants out there for their services.

Larry Adams, Piney Creek Volunteer Fire Department, talked about the needs of the Fire Department and provided their statistics. He explained that they have to pick up the payment on the previously donated fire truck, which is due August 31. He further explained their additional payments, fundraisers and grants.

Chair Ken Richardson asked if the cut in the budget would affect fire delivery services in Piney Creek.

Larry Adams stated that it wouldn't hinder fire protection services but it would hinder other calls like auto accidents, trees/animals in the roads because they would have to look at cutting other services but not fire services.

Commissioner Milly Richardson and Larry Adams talked about the turn-out gear must be replaced around 10 years. They discussed that if a fireman is injured then the first thing the State will do is look at the turn-out gear, and it isn't their choice to not upgrade but it is required.

Commissioner Doug Murphy thanked Larry Adams for the work about going out trying to find monies.

Larry Adams stated that Danny Brooks with Laurel Springs Volunteer Fire Department called and said he couldn't get here but their information is primarily the same as Piney Creek.

Terry Taylor, Medical Examiner, and Eric Thomas with Grandview Funeral Home, came before the Board to talk about the State law that says each county shall provide or contract for an appropriate facility for the examination and storage of bodies under the medical examiner's jurisdiction. He explained how the previous actions have occurred where bodies were taken to Grandview, which is a private business and can't be open after hours when needed. He further explained the need for the morgue and gave examples of when a morgue has been needed in the past.

John Hedrick, Alleghany County Library and Northwestern Regional Library, talked about the current level of funding, 10% reduction amount, Alleghany County Library's fund balance, and two unbudgeted unfunded amounts that must be paid out of the fund balance first. He further talked about the impacts to the Northwestern Regional

Library if cuts are made. He explained the maintenance of effort form and the process for the form. He asked the Board to reinstate the 10% reduction.

Chair Ken Richardson asked would it impact services.

John Hedrick answered yes, greatly.

Sandy Carter Herndon came before the Board talking about the funding for the library. She talked about other ways to generate revenues including sales taxes. She further talked about increasing the number of furlough days for employees which impacts 103 people rather than 11,000 people.

Dr. Jeff Cox came before the Board to talk about the Board of Education's concerns about the proposed cuts to their budget, packet provided earlier about funding cuts coming from the State for the next two years, relying on federal stimulus monies which will be used during the upcoming budget year, made hard decisions this current year, number of positions that they cut in this current year and looking in the future to the following year when the stimulus money runs out. He said they can't continue to operate without a significant impact to students learning with that kind of cut, part of urgency is to maintain the size of the classrooms and looking further out. He explained the degree of urgency. He talked about their capital outlay budget and how the tax decrease impacts them. He provided examples of their capital outlay budget and the impact. He asked the Commissioners to reinstate the \$60,000 that the County Manager had put in the budget. He talked about the value of education and keeping the schools strong.

Commissioner Doug Murphy mentioned that at the end of this year there will be \$125,000 coming off of capital outlay.

Bob Bamberg represented the Chamber of Commerce stating he didn't know how hard this was going to be coming after the previous groups. He said that he is excited about the Chamber for their impact to the local businesses. He talked about reasons to be optimistic about the county, retail merchants committee had recently adopted a slogan, people pulling together for the good of the county, and the County has always benefited from people coming into Allegheny County. He further talked about the positive things happening in this county and having the most active supportive board. He talked about the County Manager's proposal shows a cut in funding, and the fundraiser committee is currently working for how to have successful fundraising year. He explained that they have made cuts, and they will do a better job this year with less money. He further explained that they need \$12,000 from the County. He talked about the current 3% occupancy tax that goes to the chamber, which is one of the lowest in Northwest North Carolina. He further talked about coming in the near future to the Board about increasing the occupancy tax percentage after more discussions with his board.

Commissioner Doug Murphy and Bob Bamberg talked about looking at a possible increase in the occupancy tax 1% or preferably 2%.

Genia George representing the Arts Council talked about the number of programs that is offered, primary funding comes from Allegheny County, talked about the number of programs/number of people attending the programs and major art projects in the region. She explained how the regional artist project of Northwest North Carolina impacts Allegheny County. She thanked the Commissioners for the 42 years of support, and without the Board's support the Arts Council will not exist. She explained that the Arts Council has stayed at \$12,500 since 1998 until last year which was 9% less. She further explained that the State amount has to be matched and if it isn't then the Arts Council will cease to exist. She asked the County Commissioners to at least keep the funding at the 2009/10 level because any other level will devastate the Arts Council.

Commissioner Doug Murphy and Genia George talked about the grant allotment.

Kay Luffman came before the Board representing the Allegheny Connections. She explained what Allegheny Connections is, last July the State dropped the program,

and because of a very dedicated board they have been able to fundraise enough money to continue the program. She further explained that without the Commissioners' funding, they won't be able to have the program. She stated that they have a 90% success rate. She asked the Board to please continue to fund the small amount they ask for.

David Higgins came before the Board representing Glade Creek Volunteer Fire Department. He talked about it is hard to hear that they are getting a cut. He further talked about \$40,000 won't even cover their basis needs. He explained the quality of the volunteers then they have to do fundraisers in order to have the money to operate. He presented information about the surrounding-area comparison. He explained that they have applied for a \$15,000 grant. He further explained things that the fire departments have to do that most people don't even know about. He said they don't have elaborate stuff; just enough to operate with. He further said that they need help to operate. He reminded the Commissioners that they aren't helping one person; they are helping the entire county and all of the visitors. He said that anything the Board can do will help them.

Clarence Crouse came before the Board representing Channel 50/21, Alleghany County Television. He said that all they are asking for is the same thing to help them the best way the Board can. He talked about making the blow as soft as possible. He further talked about the purposes of their services, 1½ years ago hired a full-time station manager where they asked the Board of Education and Alleghany County to help fund the basic needs for three years, and they are in the first year, and they won't need funding assistance by the end of year three. He expressed the need for the County's help for one more year.

Charlie Scott talked about the mission statement of Alleghany County Television. He explained that they are working really hard with students from freshman through high school in educating them in the broadcasting arena. He talked about how the program is expanding in the surrounding areas. He stated that no one has done this or tried it before now, and everyone is watching to see how it goes.

Chair Ken Richardson asked without this funding, this will impact services to Alleghany County.

Clarence Crouse answered yes. He explained that they are being broadcasted in counties from Avery to Alleghany. He further explained that the sponsorships are there, and they are working to expand into Wilkes and hopefully Surry. He said that people are coming to them to see what they do.

Chair Ken Richardson declared a 5-minute recess at 7:43pm.

Debbie Wellborn and Tammy Taylor represented Appalachian senior program. They talked about cuts will put their federal funding at risks. Debbie Wellborn used examples of how the cuts will impact them. She talked about their services provided to the people in Alleghany County and volunteers that have been with them for 30 years. She further talked about they are partners with a lot of organizations in Alleghany County. She explained how they provide assistance. She talked about the impact of the loss of funding resulting in the loss of programs would have in Alleghany County. She said anything that the Board can do to help their funding will be appreciated.

Chair Ken Richardson and Debbie Wellborn talked about the amount of income to Alleghany County and the amount of the federal grant.

Commissioner Doug Murphy and Debbie Wellborn talked about the only crossover of services between Senior Services and Council on Aging are services that Council on Aging can't provide. Debbie Wellborn talked about grants that they have applied for and other activities that they are involved in and having a waiting list for services.

Pam Sizemore representing the Family Resource Center provided a little history about how they got to where they are now and how/why the County became involved in their funding. She talked about things that they have done to ensure people can receive

services, their State funding and ways to fill that grant gap being through the County. She further talked about things that they have done to offer more services in the county to accomplish the needs. She explained a graph showing area comparisons for their services which shows what they are doing is working. She talked about when they experienced a 30% cut from the State; they had to let a staff member go. She shared with the Board things that they experience at the Family Resource Center, letter from Lisa Osborne about what this cut means to Social Services and Allegheny County. She said that they are going in the right direction but they need the Commissioners' help to continue. She talked about if the funds are cut, then they have less hours to spend with children.

Commissioner Doug Murphy talked about these ladies do some of the best dealing with their monies.

Jayne Phipps-Boger with the Wilkes Community College-Allegheny Center thanked the Board for the ongoing support for Wilkes Community College. She talked about how the community college helps agencies that have been here tonight. She further talked about services they offer besides offering normal college classes, examples that they do with grant funds, key point is the relationship with the high school, numbers of students and staff members. She talked about there is not a lot more they can do. She talked about an increase in the number of students at Allegheny High School and the need for assistance to work with those particular students, curriculum by head count and FTEs earned. She talked about believing that the students will make a difference in the county.

Christy Pruess with Smoky Mountain Center thanked the Board for the continued support. She talked about she understands that this is a very challenging budget year including getting cuts from the State. She explained that the funding that they get from Allegheny County goes straight to New River.

Paige Stevens with New River Behavioral Healthcare talked about things that they have added because of the need in the community, and New River provides an array of services through the funding provided by Allegheny County. She presented statistics on their services in Allegheny County. She talked about budget cuts that have come from the State. She explained how additional cuts would impact their services. She talked about budgetary items that they have already been doing including employee salaries/benefits have been frozen or reduced and a reduction in personnel in Allegheny. She asked the Board to seek reductions in other areas rather than further burden the Allegheny County citizens.

Tommy Sports with the Forestry Service talked about the revision to their budget that was submitted. He introduced the Forestry Service staff present. He talked about the budget reduction and taking into consideration the agreement with the State. He further talked about the reduction over the last four years. He explained since 2007, they have reduced their budget by a little over \$3,000, and there isn't much room left. He pointed out services that are provided to the county and citizens through the forestry service. He talked about trainings and assistance with the fire departments, their accomplishments, current projects, grants for the fire departments that they have worked on and working with the schools. He asked the Board to take these things into consideration. He said nobody can predict the fire season but they have to be ready for it.

Chair Ken Richardson asked if a cut would impact services to citizens in Allegheny County.

Tommy Sports answered without a doubt.

Eva Wooten came before the Board representing Appalachian District Health especially the Allegheny County Health Department in regards to their concerns about the budget. She explained that they are already operating on a thin-line budget, and last year they received a lot of cuts. She further explained being a three-county district they share a lot staff, have reorganized, cut staff and eliminated all part-time positions. She said that if they receive these cuts, they will have to cut services of the adult primary care clinic which currently only has four days, more patients than can be taken

care of plus this will eliminate at least one day and already have a waiting list which cuts will make it worse. She talked about how public health crosses over several of the agencies talking tonight.

Karen Leys talked to the Commissioners as a member of the board of directors for Appalachian District Health Department about things she has witnessed while being a part of the Health Department. She stated that she hopes the Board will not cut them because it will only hurt the residents.

Ted Orten representing the Wellness Center talked about 11% of the county comes through their facility, current membership numbers, county funding enables the center to offer lower rates for sliding scale and business rates. He talked about the Century 21 grant working through the schools, and programs that they are going to be doing with the schools during the next school year. He said that the county's obesity rates statistics have come down. He reiterated that they are doing a lot of programs for the kids right now. He explained that they are working with the hospital for their therapy needs, and having three people working on several grants with one project being the permanent structure over the pool.

Gary Finney representing Sparta-Alleghany Fire Department introduced other firemen with their department. He talked about they are in opposition to the cuts, and it may seem like a small amount but it isn't to them. He further talked about the fundraisers they have, and Alleghany County's funding is how they operate on a yearly basis. He said if funding is cut they will have to cut services because they can't train as they have been which will trickle down to response time. He provided examples of how the impact would be for the fire department. He asked the Board to leave their allocation at the current level.

Darlene Douglas representing Alleghany Group Homes talked about the services that they offer, and funds were reduced last year which resulted in cuts for insurance benefits and where one person retired the position will no longer have benefits. She further talked about any cuts made to Smoky Mountain comes to them. She explained the number of employees, amount of income to employees, without those service they would have to rely on everyone else. She said that they are willing to take a cut but asked that the Board make it as minimum as possible, equitable and fair. She stated her appreciation for the support the Board provides.

Chair Ken Richardson asked for comments from the public.

Ralph Castillo said he came to support the wellness center and after hearing the people that came before the Board he wanted to mention that if there are more opportunity for people to fall out of the system, they will be in the hospital's emergency room. He talked about the commitments and having someone in the emergency room for four days, and this is occurring more and more often because of the lack of primary care where people are coming to the emergency room, which is the most expensive type of health care. He stated that they are not asking for anything this year and very appreciative for what has been done in the past but if they have to take on additional people where they fall out of the system, it will negatively affect them. He stated that he is here lending support.

DW Miles talked about how the retail employees have been impacted more than anyone in the county, sales tax revenue is down over the last three years, merchants and the chamber are working to increase sales tax by promoting shopping at home. He said they work hard to promote Alleghany County, take the position of raising revenues a little this year and next year instead of hitting everyone all at one time. He further said for everyone to look at the counties around us, stay on the progressive side, and if we don't do anything we are backing up. He urged the Board to make a good decision in whatever the Board does. He talked about the \$1,000 cut for the summer jamboree, and everyone can write a check for \$200 which is tax deductible.

Bobbie Jo Haydt thanked the Board for hearing everyone present information tonight. She talked about during the last two years \$7,500,000 debt has been approved, tax rate set at 43¢, how can the County increase expenses without increasing the revenues. She further talked about the amount of a property-tax

increase and how it would affect property owners. She gave examples of \$5 a month and things that would be cut. She stated that she doesn't think it is fair to the employees to take the raise away, have 11 furlough days and the employees shouldn't shoulder the burden. She said that this budget supports the county and let the people in the county support these organizations rather than just a few. She asked the Board to please consider that 4¢ tax increase. She talked about the proposed 21¢ tax increase as Grayson. She said she agrees with Sandy Carter about the sales tax increase. She stated her appreciation for the Board listening to these groups.

Chair Ken Richardson asked for additional comments. None were received.

Chair Ken Richardson talked about the importance of this meeting hearing from these agencies. He said that the Commissioners will have to think long and hard about what has been heard. He talked about recessing until tomorrow night and having to have a budget before the Commissioners leave then. He further talked about at least maintaining the current level of services provided for the citizens of Allegheny County rather than going backwards.

Commissioner Milly Richardson said that some of the Commissioners would like to remain here tonight, discuss the budget and make decisions. .

Commissioner Doug Murphy said he would like to have some time to review this information.

Commissioner Steve Roten talked about the Sheriff is coming tomorrow night. He informed the Board that the Sheriff has secured five federal inmates.

Chair Ken Richardson stated that he thinks the Board will be more effective if the Commissioners start on this tomorrow night.

Chair Ken Richardson recessed the meeting at 8:57pm until Thursday, June 24 at 6:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Evans  
Clerk to the Board

Attest:

Ken Richardson  
Chairman