

AT A MEETING OF THE GLOUCESTER COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HELD ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 2024, AT 6:00 P.M. IN THE COLONIAL COURTHOUSE, 6504 MAIN STREET, GLOUCESTER, VIRGINIA:

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mr. Hutson called the meeting to order, and Ms. Steele took roll call.

THERE WERE PRESENT: Christopher A. Hutson, Chair
Kevin M. Smith, Vice Chair
Phillip N. Bazzani
Ashley C. Chriscoe
Kenneth W. Gibson
Michael A. Nicosia
Robert J. Orth

THERE WERE ABSENT: None

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Edwin "Ted" Wilmot, County Attorney
Carol Steele, County Administrator

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance – Dr. Robert J. Orth – Supervisor, Abingdon District

Dr. Orth gave an invocation and then all in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

3. Citizens' Comment Period

Mr. Hutson thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He opened the citizen comment period. As there were no speakers, he closed the citizen comment period and moved to the work session agenda.

4. Work Session Agenda

a. Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority Update on Captain Sinclair Property - Christopher A. Hutson, Chair

Mr. Hutson stated that he, Mr. Chriscoe, and Ms. Steele attended the PAA (Middle Peninsula Chesapeake Bay Public Access Authority) meeting on Friday. The three users at the landing will get together to discuss the issues and will try to work them out together. If any sticking points remain, they will get an outside moderator to try to settle those points.

Dr. Orth asked about the road leading into Captain Sinclair.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that the PAA planned to maintain that road once there was a revenue source.

Mr. Hutson stated that it was still in good shape compared to its previous condition.

b. Personnel Budget Reviews

Ms. Steele stated that she appreciated that those who had positions recommended to be filled in the proposed budget were present to answer questions.

Ms. JoAnne Harris, Commissioner of Revenue, thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak regarding her requested revenue specialist position. She stated that when she came into the office there was a software conversion and there was a

lot of work by the staff to make sure that the data was converted. Then COVID hit, and there was a year and a half of focusing on the most important work to get done. This year was the first year of using the new software for the business license mailing. It took a long time. These things were a priority and took precedence over other things. She stated that staff had done an excellent job with the work accomplished, but there were additional things that she wanted to get done. She reviewed the three sections in her office were business licenses, personal property, and real estate. As the Commissioner, it was her duty to collect the revenue for the citizens. She took care of that to the best of her ability. She reviewed some statistics on the real estate section, providing information on land use applications, elderly and disabled tax relief program, and the disabled veterans tax relief applications.

Ms. Harris advised that the Chief Deputy assisted in the real estate duties as well as in the business license section. She noted that the Chief Deputy also had other duties that she had to accomplish. With the processes that the department was having to go through, the workload was such that some things were not getting done.

There was additional discussion on the workload.

Ms. Harris noted the duties of the revenue specialist at the front counter and the things being handled in addition to the front facing customer service duties. She advised that she could see the stress being put on her employees. She stated that she had a good team and they worked very hard. She stated that making sure the citizens of Gloucester got the services that they needed was her number one priority. She noted that business licenses this year took a lot of time to make sure that the mailings from the new system were correct. She stated that her business license coordinator worked over 150 hours of overtime last year. She advised that there were 2,834 business licenses. She stated that this did not count the excise, meals, and lodging taxes that were collected by her department. She advised that she and her staff worked very hard to make sure the business licenses were compliant. She noted though that she had not an opportunity to audit businesses to determine compliance due to the workload.

There was a brief discussion on this issue.

In response to a comment from Mr. Bazzani about a presentation on the need, Ms. Steele noted that she had told the directors present this evening that no presentations would be needed. She stated that she did not realize the Board would want a formal presentation. She reviewed that the position requests were all vetted by the budget team. She stated that the Commissioner's office had an enormous amount of activity going on.

Mr. Gibson clarified that the additional employee would help the County generate more revenue because of the additional time that Ms. Harris would have for auditing. When Ms. Harris agreed, he stated that he understood her to say that the workload in the department had increased due to the tax relief programs for elderly, disabled, fire fighters, and veterans, in addition to the increases in business licenses.

Mr. Hutson stated that he was glad Ms. Harris had attended. He stated that he was not intimately familiar with any of the positions in the office. He noted that Ms. Harris was doing the job 40 hours a week and the Board was only at meetings twice a month. He recommended that the Board keep in mind that staff were the ones familiar with the workload.

There was additional discussion about the duties of the revenue specialist.

Mr. Chriscoe asked how many positions were covered by the State.

Ms. Harris stated that four positions were covered with State funding.

Mr. Gibson noted that the County was in a tight budget situation and the Commissioner's mission was to collect the revenue. He stated that it was a tough job and any position that could help in collecting more revenue was appropriate.

There was additional discussion on the number of overtime hours and cost.

Mr. Smith thanked Ms. Harris for coming and stated that he felt she provided a good explanation of the need for this position.

Ms. Harris stated that Mr. Chriscoe had made a comment at an earlier meeting that the Commissioner's mechanism for evaluating vehicles was flawed. She advised that she was not the one to place the values on the vehicles and it was the same mechanism that had been used for 38 years. She reviewed that by State Code 58.1-3503, she had to use a recognized pricing guide to value vehicles. She noted that only one, J. D. Powers, mass valued vehicles. She stated that there was no way with her staff could use the other available guides, such as Kelly Blue Book, to individually evaluate over 33,000 vehicles in the County. She reviewed the values that were used for cars and trucks.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that he was sorry if Ms. Harris felt he had taken a shot at her office. He noted that he was indicating that the State had legislated a mechanism to use for valuation that was not fair for the current values of vehicles.

Ms. Harris stated that the Board members were welcome to visit the office, and she would be glad to show them the operations and have them talk with staff.

Ms. Kersey then spoke for Social Services. She introduced Rebecca Morgan, from the Middlesex County Department of Social Services and Tiffany Gordon of Mathews County Social Services. She reviewed that the three departments were collaborating to request a shared fraud investigator position. She noted that the investigator would be used to prevent, identify, and prosecute, public assistance fraud, waste, and abuse so that only qualified individuals received benefits.

Mr. Bazzani asked if Gloucester would see a benefit if the investigator were to discover a fraudulent case.

Ms. Kersey advised that any funds recovered would go to the State and then helped to fund the State and local fraud control programs. She noted that those funds may help to cover the cost of the investigator. She advised that this position would be funded by all three localities with Middlesex and Mathews each paying a quarter and Gloucester paying half.

Mr. Bazzani questioned the benefit of the investigator if Gloucester would not recoup the funds.

Ms. Morgan, Middlesex Social Services, reviewed several instances of fraud in her County. She advised that if a local fraud investigator had been in place, then some of that may have been prevented or at least caught and stopped in a timelier manner. In response to further questions, she noted that while local law enforcement was helpful and responsive, because SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) was a federal program, they referred cases to the State Police and sometimes the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Mr. Gibson stated that what he was hearing was that there was a fraud problem that was interfering with citizens who should rightfully be receiving benefits, and that there was also an impact on local businesses. Having worked in the criminal justice field, he knew that a big effect of an investigator was deterrence. Even though an investigator would not be generating revenue there were a lot of positive effects and he felt this position was reasonable.

Mr. Bazzani stated that law enforcement should be taking care of these issues.

Ms. Kersey reminded Mr. Bazzani of his previous support for a contracted fraud investigator. She also noted that while recouped funds were not returned to Gloucester, they did go back to the State and that was beneficial.

There was additional discussion on examples of fraudulent cases and the harm to businesses.

Ms. Steele advised that the Board of Social Services strongly advocated for this position. It was a split position with Gloucester, Mathews, and Middlesex counties. She noted that because of that, it was a low price to prevent and stop these crimes.

After a brief discussion on possible repercussions for those convicted of fraud, Mr. Chriscoe stated that while there was not a direct payback to the localities, as the counties worked together to stop fraud, the benefits would then be spent more effectively and efficiently in the localities.

Ms. Nunn then discussed the request for the Human Resources department. She stated that she was asking for a part time position to work 24 hours per week at the front desk. She advised that this position would allow the team to have the bandwidth needed for other areas. She noted that the current Human Resources Coordinator at the front desk needed to be given more duties to handle. Currently, she was juggling customer service and administrative work with a lot of interruptions. Having a dedicated front desk person was important. That person would also be responsible for file creation and orientation packets. Currently the team in the department consisted of herself, two analysts, and one coordinator.

There was a discussion on changes in the responsibilities in the HR positions and on succession planning in the County.

Sheriff Warren discussed his personnel request. He reviewed that the department had two K-9s and he noted the type of tracking each performed. He

advised that with the increase in firearm incidents, the department had applied for an ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) grant and had been awarded funding for another K-9 that would specialize in explosives and weapons detection. The grant also included the training and the vehicle. He advised that Deputy Woodard was selected to train with the new dog, and they would be certified as a K-9 team. He stated that he was asking for the position to fill the slot that Deputy Woodard would be vacating.

Dr. Orth asked about solve rates for the department and how Sheriff Warren was seeing the crime issue in general in the County.

Sheriff Warren stated that last year although there had been an increase in violent crimes, there had been an overall decrease in crime rates. He advised that though the calls for service were the same or slightly lower, the calls were taking a lot longer to process. He noted that mental health was driving some of this issue. He reviewed some of the problems with these types of calls.

There was a discussion on maintenance of custody for mental health patients.

Mr. Gibson asked for a status update on the hiring of the SROs (school resource officers).

Sheriff Warren stated that they were fully staffed although not yet at full strength due to police academy training. He noted though that he had three senior staff in the department that were retiring this year.

On an alternate topic, Mr. Hutson stated that there was an issue with the number of calls that came into the Administration department that were for the Social Services office.

Mr. Bains stated that staff continued to notify Google that the listing for the Social Services department was giving the County Administration office number. He agreed that it was an issue, and the IT (Information Technology) staff were continuing to report it.

Mr. Bazzani stated that he would propose doing away with the fraud investigator position and instead get another building inspector.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that the reason the inspector should not be funded this year was because we had not been able to get the office to full capacity and keep it at capacity in several years.

Ms. Steele stated that she had anticipated funding the new inspector position at the half year mark before the budget shortfall had come to focus. She noted as Mr. Chriscoe had stated, that the current positions were not all filled. She stated that the building position would probably be needed next year.

There was a discussion on the network analyst position and network security issues.

c. Budget Discussion

Ms. Steele advised that as the Board was aware, there was a moving up of staff in the Parks, Rec and Tourism office which resulted in personnel savings. The Historic Resources Specialist could now be funded with no cost to the budget.

Mr. Gibson stated that he supported that addition and without any additional expenditure, he felt it was a good decision.

Ms. Steele stated that there had been several questions about fund balance. She advised that Ms. Calloway had been working with staff and projecting where the County may be by June 30. She stated that there was significant vacancy savings and she reviewed some of the reasons for that anticipated savings. She noted however, that she did not believe it appropriate to count on that money. She wanted to make the Board aware though that there would likely be a higher amount in fund balance by June 30 than what was originally expected.

There was a brief discussion on vacancy savings and fund balance, and the meals and lodging tax collections.

Ms. Steele stated that she would also like additional guidance on whether to have any presentations from other agencies or individuals at a future meeting.

After brief discussion, it was the consensus not to bring anyone else in at this point.

Mr. Wilmot stated that he had been asked if the real estate taxes could be modified after adoption and the answer was yes. He noted however, that the Treasurer clarified that the tax rates cannot be increased after the date of delivery of the land book by the Commissioner of Revenue. He stated that he wanted to make sure the Board was aware that though the tax rate could be modified after adoption, there was a limited window of time for the change.

Mr. Hutson asked for the Board's input on future budget meetings.

There was a brief discussion on future dates.

5. Closed Meeting

a. Potential disposition of an interest in real property known as the old Page Middle School property

Mr. Chriscoe moved, seconded by Mr. Gibson, to enter closed meeting. The motion carried and was approved by the following roll call vote: Mr. Bazzani, Mr. Chriscoe, Mr. Gibson, Mr. Hutson, Mr. Nicosia, Dr. Orth, and Mr. Smith - yes.

CLOSED MEETING RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Gloucester County Board of Supervisors desires to discuss a particular subject in Closed Meeting during the course of its meeting on March 13, 2024; and

WHEREAS, the nature of the subject is:

Discussion or consideration of the disposition of an interest in publicly held real property known as the old Page Middle School property. The discussion of same in Closed Meeting is expressly permitted by Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(3).

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Gloucester County Board of Supervisors does hereby convene in Closed Meeting for the purpose herein expressed pursuant to the legal authority herein recited.

Mr. Chriscoe moved, seconded by Dr. Orth, to return to open meeting. The motion carried and was approved by the following roll call vote: Mr. Bazzani, Mr. Chriscoe, Mr. Gibson, Mr. Hutson, Mr. Nicosia, Dr. Orth, and Mr. Smith - yes.

RESOLUTION TO RETURN TO OPEN MEETING

WHEREAS, the Gloucester County Board of Supervisors has completed its discussion in Closed Meeting, and now desires to continue its open meeting; and

WHEREAS, only public business matters lawfully exempted from Open Meeting were heard, discussed, or considered during the Closed Meeting, and the only subjects heard, discussed, or considered in said Closed Meeting were the matters identified in the Resolution by which it was convened.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Gloucester County Board of Supervisors does hereby reconvene in Open Meeting at its meeting of March 13, 2024, and certifies the matters set forth in Virginia Code Section 2.2-3712(D).

6. Adjournment

Mr. Smith moved, seconded by Dr. Orth, to adjourn. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 8:51 p.m. by a unanimous voice vote.

Christopher A. Hutson, Chair

Carol E. Steele, County Administrator