

AT A REGULAR MEETING OF THE GLOUCESTER COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HELD ON MONDAY, APRIL 28, 2025, AT 6:00 P.M. IN THE COLONIAL COURTHOUSE, 6504 MAIN STREET, GLOUCESTER, VIRGINIA:

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

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

THERE WERE PRESENT: Kevin M. Smith, Chair
Ashley C. Chriscoe, Vice Chair
Phillip N. Bazzani
Kenneth W. Gibson
Christopher A. Hutson
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. Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Chriscoe moved, seconded by Mr. Hutson, to adopt the agenda. The motion carried and was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

4. Public Comment Period

HOWARD MOWRY - YORK DISTRICT

Mr. Mowry stated that when conservative ideas were in place the personnel had very strict rules. It appeared today in a liberal environment; taxes could be spent for personal benefit. In the old days, government employees had to pay for our coffee and condiments out of our own pocket. Looking at the budget, there was an employee recognition line and a benefit program line with a combined total of over \$70,000. What were these funds spent on? He reviewed the charges for service awards and retirement gifts. He noted that it was time to look at where the tax dollars were spent. Individuals worked for advancement and a fair pension. He stated that the cost of awards needed to be limited. Now it was clear why DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) needed to be developed to find better ways to accomplish the metrics of government.

HEATHER KING - ABINGDON DISTRICT

Ms. King stated that she had four kids in Gloucester County Public Schools, and she wanted to advocate for the Community Engagement Program. She advised that it was an important and valuable part of the schools and the community. She noted that she had been volunteering in the schools since 2009 and her time in the schools had been facilitated by the Community Engagement Coordinators. She

reviewed her volunteerism. She stated that she saw what the coordinators did in the schools, and they were busy people. She noted that among other things, they oversaw a massive workforce of volunteers, were involved in communication, provided enrichment opportunities for students, organized after school programs, and have conducted outreach in partnership with the local community. She noted that many students in the schools have food insecurity. The Community Engagement Coordinators work with local churches and others to assist with the provision of food for the weekend for students who may be dealing with food insecurity. She stated that she wanted to share this information with the Board for consideration during budget development.

TERESA ALTEMUS - GLOUCESTER POINT DISTRICT

Ms. Altemus reviewed information from previous board packets on transfers to utilities. She noted that to her knowledge, the last transfer was in 2018. She estimated that using the last transfer amount of \$430,524, that amount over the last seven years would be just over \$3,000,000. She asked where that money went. She questioned whether it had been absorbed into other areas of the budget. She stated that the Board was going to have to raise taxes to modernize the current utilities. She agreed that everyone in the County utilized the water system when shopping, going to restaurants, or in the schools. She noted that she looked at the water lines and she noted that there were over 6,000 properties that the water lines passed that were not connected. She asked for current information on the assets of the department. She noted that the tolls would be coming off the Coleman Bridge and questioned how the Board would be able to put water and sewer into new subdivisions if something was not done now.

5. Work Session Agenda**a. Budget Discussion**

Dr. Orth stated that there had been a number of items mentioned in the last meeting. He recommended that the Board discuss each and either agree to add or dispel. For instance, in reference to unassigned fund balance, the policy stated that the level had to be between 14%-16%. The Board needed to decide where that should be. In addition, there needed to be discussion on the cost of living (COLA) level and utilities.

Mr. Bazzani stated that he recommended that the COLA not be provided to those who made over \$90,000. He had asked the County Attorney to provide information.

Mr. Wilmot stated that there were 47 County employees who made \$90,000 or more. Of that number, the Board could choose not to approve the full COLA for 29 of the 47. The Board could not decline the COLA for Constitutional Officers or DSS (Department of Social Services). The estimated savings for that declination would be about \$110,000.

In reference to training and career development, Dr. Orth asked whether employees were required to continue service for a number of years once they passed a training.

Ms. Steele stated that there was a policy on training. If the training exceeded \$1,500, it had to be approved by the County Administrator and the employee was required to stay for a period of time afterwards or would have to reimburse the cost of the training.

There was a brief discussion on training.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that if it was necessary, he did not have a problem taking the fund balance down to 14% if there was an extraordinary circumstance if there was a plan to start getting it back to 15%.

Mr. Bazzani stated that he would support going down to 15%. He discussed the removal of the tolls on the Coleman Bridge and urged the Board to consider what the future would look like without the tolls.

Mr. Hutson stated that as he indicated last year, he would not support the use of unassigned fund balance for recurring expenses. He noted that the current Comprehensive Plan supported growth and he recommended that if the Board did not want to support growth, given Mr. Bazzani's comments on the toll removal, then the Comprehensive Plan needed to be reviewed in more depth.

Dr. Orth noted that for future discussion, the Board may want to consider where growth would be most appropriate.

Mr. Bazzani noted that another issue was the firehouse. He noted that instead of one large firehouse on Main Street, maybe there should be three smaller stations strategically located around the County.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that the fire station currently owned land in Owl Trap. They had not sought funding for a station there because there were no volunteers. He advised that they knew where the volunteers were and where the call volume was located. He stated that they were well aware of growth and how they could serve the public.

There was a brief discussion on the time for preparation of documents for the fire department project and the current estimated cost.

Mr. Gibson stated that a citizen had raised the issue of the importance of Community Engagement Coordinators at the schools.

Ms. Steele noted that these were county positions. She stated this was a partnership between the County and the Schools - they provided the space, and the County provided the staffing.

Board members briefly discussed the fire department staffing, and growth in the County.

Mr. Nicosia stated that the Board had given the fire department its support. He noted that he agreed with Mr. Hutson about the fund balance. He stated that the Board saw that the proposed 3% cut in budgets would actually hurt the departments

and he thought it would also impact customer service. He advised that if positions had to be eliminated because of budget cuts, then citizens would not be able to get things done.

Mr. Smith asked for additional information on unassigned fund balance.

Ms. Calloway noted that in the Board's policy, 15% was the minimum required to maintain liquidity.

Dr. Orth stated that the Board needed to decide what to put in or cut from the budget.

Mr. Hutson stated that during last week's meeting, the Board had added almost \$1 million to the County Administrator's proposed budget.

Mr. Bazzani stated that cutting heads was the easiest way to cut costs, but looking at process improvements and consolidating functions was the smarter way.

Ms. Steele stated that she wanted to make sure that the public understood that in the value statements for the employees, process improvements were considered continuously. She reviewed some of the recent efforts to review processes for efficiencies, and cross training employees. She noted that the Board could choose not to offer services that were not mandated, but there were things that were not mandated that the Board provided to make Gloucester as special as it was. She noted that she would not want the community to think that there were excess staff or that staff did not continually look at ways to streamline services.

Dr. Orth then brought up utilities. He noted that Gloucester staff took care of both water and sewer. Other localities had staff dedicated to one or the other. He advised that the department needed more people and could not get them.

There was a discussion on development possibilities when the toll comes off the Coleman Bridge.

55 Mr. Gibson noted that growth could occur with new homes but also through the value of existing homes. He stated that was where the value of an outstanding school system, excellent parks and recreation system, and the value of services made the existing homes more attractive. He advised that there were some in the community who consistently spoke out against parks and recreation, school, and infrastructure needs. He stated that it was important to keep in mind that those were the things that could enhance the value of current homes and keep the County rural.

There was some discussion about current population growth projections, and the possible windfall with a tax increase.

Mr. Hutson stated that with the money that the Board added to the budget next week, there needed to be some discussion on what the Board wanted to modify.

Ms. Calloway reviewed the budget spreadsheet and showed the additions made at the last meeting. She reviewed the proposed use of fund balance.

The Board considered increasing the personal property tax rate, reducing the use of unassigned fund balance, and reducing the real estate tax increase.

Mr. Bazzani asked whether the schools had done a study on means testing the school lunch program in order to cut costs.

1:14 Mr. Duran, Chief Financial Officer of Gloucester County Public Schools, noted that they had not done a study. However, he advised that they had conversations with the Virginia Department of Education. If a means tested model was used, it would be expected that some families would continue to not pay and there would be some fund balance issues with food services.

Mr. Nicosia asked whether the amount for the Chromebooks was a lump sum for all of the devices.

Mr. Hartley, Deputy Superintendent, Gloucester County Public Schools, stated that this amount would not replace all the devices but would replace about one-third.

There was a discussion on the Chromebook replacement cycle.

Board members then discussed modifications to the proposed tax rates.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that the Board had not yet cut anything out of the budget and had not yet discussed utilities. He further stated that he thought whatever the rate payers were paying, the County should be matching.

Ms. Steele stated that there were so many capital needs. She advised that any extra infusion of cash should be used for one time funding projects. She noted that one of the main issues with utilities was staffing. She reviewed some of the operating issues due to that.

Board members discussed potential future shortages for debt service on the fire station, and the date that the regional jail payment would end.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that he did not know whether the amount for the school lunch program would be enough. He expressed frustration with being put in the position of the locality having to pay for what the federal government had taken away. He also noted that he supported the veterans' programs, but the State did not help the localities with funding for the tax relief.

There was additional discussion on the budget.

Mr. Gibson noted that it was not too late for the Board to consider options. He stated that utilities was having difficulty hiring and building inspections was having the same struggle. He advised that there did not seem to be bloated departments across the County. He stated that cutting employees was a legitimate consideration; however, it seemed to him that the County did not have bloated departments and cutting staff would mean cutting services. He noted that he wanted to retain the \$37,000 increase for the civic groups. He noted that if the Chromebooks and school lunches were cut, maybe they could be funded with the cash infusion after the start of the fiscal year.

There was additional discussion on the schools.

Mr. Nicosia stated that the Board had not looked at the original proposed budget. He further stated that the Board should consider what was presented and consider whether there was anything to change.

There was a discussion about the local transfer to schools, per pupil funding increase, use of the Chromebooks in the classrooms, and the school budget requests.

2:21 Mr. Chriscoe recommended that the amount for the Chromebooks be removed and let the schools find the funding for them. He stated that the Board could not be on the hook for every mandate that expired.

Mr. Hutson stated that it was aggravating that the Board was critical of every item of the School Board's, but the School Board was an elected body. He noted that the Board gave money to other organizations and did not question what they would be doing with those funds. He stated that the Board needed to figure out what decisions needed to be made. He noted in addition that utilities had not been discussed.

Mr. Chriscoe stated that Mr. Gibson had proposed earlier to remove the Chromebooks and school lunches and asked for that to be shown on the spreadsheet.

There was additional discussion on modifications to the personal property tax and real estate tax rates.

Dr. Orth noted that at the last meeting there had been discussion on some cuts from departments. He asked about making cuts in areas that were not salaries.

Ms. Steele noted that some of the cuts would be impactful, stating that there were not that many line items in some cases to cut.

There was a brief review of the training amounts in the proposed budget.

Mr. Smith called for a ten minute recess.

After the recess, Mr. Chriscoe proposed adding the cost for the school lunch program to the budget and using fund balance one time only to allow the schools time to means test the lunch program. He recommended leaving the Chromebooks as a go get amount for the School Board.

There was a discussion on the Planning District Commission line in the Board of Supervisors budget, and on how vacancy savings were allocated.

Mr. Nicosia asked for the Chromebooks to be added to the unassigned fund balance to see the effect, thinking the Board may be able to cover the Chromebooks this year and could let the schools know they would not be covered next year.

Ms. Calloway noted the fund balance level would be 14.9%.

Mr. Nicosia stated that he had wanted to see the effect but indicated the Chromebooks should be removed based on the level of fund balance.

Mr. Chriscoe noted that the School Board could choose to reconfigure how they spend funds.

There was a discussion with Mr. Hartley on the shortage of bus drivers.

Mr. Hutson asked if the proposed one year chance to do the means testing for school lunches would be helpful.

Mr. Hartley noted that free lunches were not free. He advised that the schools reimbursement rate was not 100%. If the schools went back to a paid food model, then those who would still qualify could apply for the free and reduced rate.

There was a brief discussion on the percentage of the students who may still qualify, food services, and the lack of fund balance in the food service fund.

Board members discussed utilities and questioned rate increases in other localities.

Ms. Legg, Director of Public Utilities, stated that the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission was collecting rate information from all the member localities in order to generate a report. That information was not yet available.

There was a brief discussion on looking at possible cuts to non-personnel line items in county departments.

Mr. Chriscoe noted that although he did not like tax increases, it appeared the budget as it stood was probably the least painful route.

Dr. Orth noted that with the approximately 2 cent loss to revenue due to veterans' tax relief and the Board's use of fund balance last year equivalent to just over 1 cent, the current proposed tax increase of 3.1cents was about equivalent to that total.

6. Adjournment

Dr. Orth moved, seconded by Mr. Chriscoe, to adjourn. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 9:18 p.m. by a unanimous voice vote.

Kevin M. Smith, Chair

Carol E. Steele, County Administrator