

April 19, 2006

At a **budget workshop meeting** of the Southampton County Board of Supervisors held in the Board Room of the Southampton County Office Center at 26022 Administration Center Drive, Courtland, Virginia on April 19, 2006 at 6:30 PM.

SUPERVISORS PRESENT

Dallas O. Jones, Chairman (Drewryville)
Walter L. Young, Jr., Vice-Chairman (Franklin)
Walter D. Brown, III (Newsoms)
Carl J. Faison (Boykins-Branchville)
Anita T. Felts (Jerusalem)
Ronald M. West (Berlin-Ivor)
Moses Wyche (Capron)

SUPERVISORS ABSENT

None

OTHERS PRESENT

Michael W. Johnson, County Administrator (Clerk)
James A. Randolph, Assistant County Administrator
Julia G. Williams, Finance Director
Susan H. Wright, Administrative Secretary

Chairman Jones called the meeting to order.

Mrs. Stacy Bradshaw of the Chowan Basin Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) was the first to speak to their budget. She provided copies of *A Year in Review – FY 2005/06 (Year to Date)*, which highlighted their accomplishments this past year, to the Board members. The SWCD had been operating for almost 61 years. They had provided cost-share and technical assistance to many landowners and agricultural producers within the 3 counties they covered, which were Greensville, Southampton, and Sussex. In the 10 years she had worked for the District, she had seen their programs grow and expand to new customers. They provided educational activities and information about our natural resources to adult and youth groups. Last year, they provided information to over 2,000 residents. In cooperation with Virginia Cooperative Extension, they had a youth farm day coming up in May that would reach all 3rd graders in Southampton County. They had a tire-recycling day and collected 30 tons of tires this year from Southampton County. The Board's continued support would enable them to carry out their mission of protecting our natural resources and sharing information with people in the County. She asked them to consider their funding request in the amount of \$7,000.

Mr. Eric Cooke, Commonwealth's Attorney, spoke to their budget. He advised that his staff consisted of 3 attorneys, 2 administration staff persons, and the Victim-Witness Office. He understood that they were eligible for another attorney. He had not requested one this year because they did not have the space, but he looked forward to that possibility somewhere down the road. They continued to vigorously prosecute felonies and misdemeanors. They were working under an increased caseload with the same staff they had had for several years, and would continue to do that. They had been working hard this year on assess forfeiture. They had forfeited a known "crack house" and that was in the process of being sold. Those assets would continue to be used to fight the war against drugs. The Victim-Witness Program was still an important part of their office. Cora Gay, Victim-Witness Coordinator, was still working hard in assisting them with everything they were doing in the courts. He was excited that with the help of Sandi Plyler, Southampton County Data Processing Manager, they had recently installed the VCASE management software, which was being used by most commonwealth attorney's offices throughout the state. The computers were also now networked. He advised that he was very appreciate of the Board including his staff in the pay and classification plan. He thanked the Board for their support over the past year. It had meant a tremendous amount to him personally. With their support, they had been able to focus on prosecuting and not where the next box of pencils would come from. He requested that they approve their budget request for this year.

Mr. Cooke clarified that money for the additional attorney they were eligible for was not included in his budget request, as he had not requested an additional attorney for this year.

Mr. Demetrios Peratsakis of Mental Health Services/Western Tidewater Community Services Board spoke to their budget. He distributed a packet containing financial and consumer services information to the Board. The \$72,000 received from the County last year enabled them to provide almost \$1 million of psychiatric and mental services to approximately 250 chronically disabled individuals, including children. They were requesting funding this year in the amount of \$77,000. The requested increase in funding was due to the substantive increase in service hours they had been providing.

Supervisor Brown asked if the increase in service hours were attributable to more clients? Mr. Peratsakis replied no. Ultimately they were providing more services.

Ms. Vanessa Jones of the Southampton County Department of Social Services spoke to their budget. She stated that she knew they were used to seeing Judy English, Social Services Director, but she had to undergo surgery today and asked her to deliver her remarks. She asked the members of their staff who were present to stand and be recognized. As they could see, at least half of their agency was present. She noted that at the conclusion of her remarks, she would provide the Board with a handout describing the types of programs and the number of recipients they had worked with over the last fiscal year. The statistics would show an increase from the previous year in the number of individuals served in every program. With the support of the Board, they were there to help the County residents who could not make it on their own. She advised that their agency maintained extremely low error rates, compared to the rest of the state, in determining eligibility for financial assistance. They may have heard about the national child and family services reviews being conducted across the nation, which no state had passed. Their agency routinely met the targets set for the outcome measures used in those reviews. Their central office recently advised them that they were the only agency in the state to have 100% compliance with both of the funding reviews they had conducted. To continue delivering services at this level, they needed the Board's continued support. They had prepared a conservative budget and were respectfully requesting an increase of \$3,670. She thanked the Board for their support and sent a special thank you to Supervisor Wyche, who served on the Social Services Board.

Mr. David Britt, Southampton County Treasurer, spoke to their budget. He advised that he had included 3 new items in his budget request. The first was related to the need to accept debit and credit cards in his office, as an increasing number of people wanted to use them. The second was related to the need for increased security in the office. Last year at the Treasurer's Conference, the Hanover County Sheriff's Office demonstrated a mock robbery of treasurer's offices. After seeing that, he talked with our Sheriff's Office to determine what we could do to better secure our treasurer's office. He was looking to phase those things in over time. The third item was related to the need to prevent identity theft. Due to the social security numbers and other private information kept in their office, they needed an effective way to destroy that information. He had put in a request to set up a contract with a company called Shred It. They would come in and destroy the items on site as we watched them. He had talked to Julia Williams, Finance Director, and they came to the conclusion that a number of departments could share and benefit from this. He stated that he appreciated his staff being included in the pay and classification plan.

Supervisor Brown asked wouldn't it cost the County 2% - 3% to accept credit cards? Mr. Britt replied yes. He added that the cost to accept debit cards ranged from \$0.45 - \$1.92, but the average was \$0.75. Supervisor Brown asked if those costs had been included in the budget request? Mr. Britt replied yes, he had included estimates for those charges in the budget request.

Supervisor West asked if he had a feel for the total amount it would cost the County? Mr. Britt replied that he had estimated \$2,500 this year, but it would depend on actual usage.

Mr. Britt advised that those services were being offered in the Southampton Clerk's Office and Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court. Franklin had been offering them for a number of years.

Supervisor West commented that perhaps it would help with delinquent tax collection. Supervisor Brown remarked that he thought at least 75% of people would use those services. Supervisor West stated that if it was convenient and worked for the people, it was good thing. If we found it cost too much, we could stop it. Mr. Britt stated we could end the contract at any time.

Ms. Pat Ward, Director of the Blackwater Regional Library, passed out informational handouts.

Ms. Iola Scott, Branch Manager of the Walter Cecil Rawls Library, then spoke to their budget. She advised that their programs included literacy programs, attention deficit programs, and math and science programs. They also had a program entitled *Young and Restless* for ages 3 and under, and a program entitled *Movers and Shakes* for ages 3-5. It was important to start off the little ones in reading programs. They also had a teen read week. They had done a lot of changing in the Library. They had a new sofa with track lighting and a new family resource center. They had books on subjects such as potty training, and how to explain to your child about divorce. They would like to increase their collections on Native Americans and the Civil War. They appreciated what the Board had done for them so far and asked that they continue to support them.

Supervisor Brown asked if the budget provided for any additional time that the Library could be open, such as staying open later than 12 Noon on Saturday? Ms. Scott replied no.

Ms. Randi Blumeson of the Virginia Legal Aid Society spoke to their budget. She provided the Board informational handouts. She advised that they were based out of Lynchburg but their office was in Suffolk. They represented low-income individuals in civil cases only. Their clients must have incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level, which was about \$20,000 for a family of three. They represented clients in family, housing, consumer, and benefit cases, wills, powers of attorney, and uncontested divorces. Last year they closed 34 cases for Southampton County, representing 89 family members. They anticipated that number to increase dramatically because they had started a new program called Law Line. With that program, people could call and speak to one of 6 paralegals, 2 of which spoke Spanish, in various offices, and they could be given advice in cases that just required advice and not coming into the office. She gave examples of how Legal Aid had helped clients in Southampton County and clients in general. She advised that they relied greatly on local support and asked that the Board continue supporting them.

Supervisor Brown asked, regarding the fact that their clients must have incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level, what drives that? Ms. Blumeson replied federal law.

Mr. Vice Holt, President of the Southampton County Fire and Rescue Association, spoke to their budget. He stated that they put together a budget committee in December. At the February meeting, they came back with a budget request to be presented to the County. They were requesting an increase of \$4,374.07 for each fire department and an increase of \$4,695.28 for each rescue squad. They were asking for an increase from \$935 to \$1,150 for safety equipment, a \$50 increase for rescue/fire stations that served as polling places, and a 25% increase in the operating cost for the 24/7 zone car. The requests were based on true costs. He advised that the Capital Improvements Program had meant a lot to them. Fuel costs was cutting into money that could be used elsewhere. The supply of garments was limited, as Dupont was one of a few companies that produced the fabrics they needed, and the price was going up. The cost of one breathing apparatus was now about \$3,000. He stated that he thought they provided a tremendous service. The starting salary for a career firefighter was \$30,000, and some of our fire and rescue departments operated on less than that. They were tremendously thankful for the communications project that was in the works. Mr. Johnson had done an outstanding job in communicating with them in regards to the status of that project. They requested that the Board approve their funding request.

Supervisor Brown thanked them for their service. Mr. Holt clarified for Supervisor Brown that they had some grant funding coming in, but they had earmarked it to help with the communications project. They did seek grants and the departments shared their success with each other. They were also blessed with funding from other sources such as the Camp Foundation.

Mr. Charles Turner, Superintendent, spoke to their budget and presented a PowerPoint presentation. He advised that the mission of Southampton Public Schools, through the combined efforts of staff, students, families and the community, was to ensure a quality education in a safe environment that would prepare students to be successful learners and productive citizens in an ever-changing society. Their focus areas were student achievement, school safety, facilities, technology, transportation, communication, and professionalism. He advised that all 6 schools were fully accredited. Many schools of the same size and demographics had not achieved that success. The dropout rate was one of the lowest in the state. The average County-wide student attendance this year was 95%. Factors influencing their progress were staffing, programs, facilities, parental support, and community support. He stated that they would be offering a new class, Robotics Inventions and Innovations. They were working with NASA to set up a virtual field trip where students could talk to astronauts. The School Board had approved a Dual Credit Associate Degree Program, where a student could graduate from Southampton High School and receive an Associate's Degree from Paul D. Camp Community College simultaneously.

He advised that their budget request was built on the premise of maintaining current programs and operations while being conservative. The budget proposed the following:

- **Personnel and Salaries** – Minimum 5% salary increase. This was essential to stay competitive with surrounding localities. Franklin and Emporia were able to give \$11,000 - \$15,000 signing bonuses because they were considered “hard-to-staff” schools.
- **Staffing** – An increase in the amount of \$788,226 to provide for the addition of 1 instructional technology teacher, 1 elementary education teacher, and internal adjustments.
- **Instruction Not Including Personnel** – Offsetting the mandated cost in special education continued to be a consideration. Fixed charges ran \$800 - \$900 thousand annually. SOL materials had to be purchased and teachers had to be given the resources to fulfill expectations in that area. The Summer School Program had expanded its focus due to state mandates. Salaries must also be increased to attract and retain summer school teachers.
- **Transportation and Maintenance** – Fuel costs had risen significantly. They operated 69 buses and 28 cars per day to transport students, totaling about 6,000 miles per day.

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- **Fringe Benefits/Debt Service** – Fringe benefit increases were scattered throughout categories. The Virginia Retirement System rates had increased significantly with a total impact of over \$600,000. Debt service decreased by \$78,546.

Mr. Turner advised that they were ultimately requesting an increase of \$724,633 in local funding.

Supervisor Brown advised that he hoped the high school could get a JROTC program. It was not just for kids that did not do well. Mr. Turner agreed. He stated that if a kid could not be an athlete, for example, they could find pride with something else, such as the JROTC program.

Vice-Chairman Young stated that he saw school cars on the road all the time and there was never more than 1 child in the car. Mr. Turner stated that those cars were taking children with special needs to Suffolk or elsewhere. They had kids with situations in which they had to be isolated. Supervisor West asked, if 2 kids could not sit together in the back of a car, how could they interact at school? Mr. Turner stated that special, trained people worked with them once they got to school.

The Board then began budget deliberations.

Chairman Jones advised that this was his 23rd budget. We could go through and trim a few thousand dollars, but nothing significant.

Vice-Chairman Young referred to page 2-207 in the budget and asked about the truck requested by Jackie Vick, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor. He had requested a truck capable to be fitted with a detachable snow plow. Mrs. Julia Williams stated that they had scaled down that truck.

Supervisors West, Felts and Wyche indicated that they agreed with Chairman Jones.

Supervisor Brown stated that the budget was driven by the assessment. We did not know how things with the Board of Equalization would turn out. He thought that revenues would decrease as a result of the Board of Equalization's work. He thought Mr. Johnson and staff had done as much forecasting as they could with what they had. But he saw where increases in the tax rate were needed in some areas, such as schools, and decreases were needed in others. There were so many unknowns. Based on that, he would recommend a 10¢ rather than a 12¢ reduction in the tax rate.

Mr. Johnson clarified that the Board of Supervisors typically adopted a budget by May 30. They could wait until June but he did not recommend it. The School Board must adopt theirs by May 1.

Supervisor Faison advised that he understood what Supervisor Brown was saying. Since there were so many variables, maybe we should consider reducing the tax rate by 10¢ instead of 12¢.

Supervisor West stated that we needed to move forward. There was a rumor that the assessment may not be valid, but we could not wait. Supervisor Felts stated let the chips fall where they may. We needed to go forward. Supervisor Wyche agreed.

Supervisor West advised that Mr. Johnson had always erred on the side of caution and he thought this was a conservative budget.

Mr. Johnson advised that there was no need to rush into a decision tonight. There had not been anything in the paper so they had yet to hear from their constituents. He noted that he appreciated Supervisor West's comment that the budget was conservative. He would be surprised if the real estate tax rate would need to be increased.

Supervisor Brown asked if Blue Ridge Mass Appraisal was still under contract with the County? Mr. Johnson replied yes.

Mr. Johnson advised that of the 9 speakers tonight, 5 were not fully funded. We budgeted \$388,000 less than requested for the Schools, and about \$47,000 less than requested for the Fire and Rescue Association. Funding was not budgeted for a new security system in the Treasurer's Office. Virginia Legal Aid was not fully funded. Western Tidewater Community Services Board requested an 8% increase and we provided for a 5% increase. He noted that funding was included in the budget for one additional staff person, which was an additional building inspector.

It was consensus of the Board to continue with budget deliberations following their regular meeting on Monday, April 24, 2006.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Dallas O. Jones, Chairman

Michael W. Johnson, Clerk