

**COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**Monday, January 21, 2025**

**5:30 P.M. – Closed Session**

**6:30 P.M. – Regular Session**

The Honorable Columbus County Commissioners met on the above stated date and time at the Columbus County Commissioners Chamber, 127 West Webster Street, Whiteville, North Carolina 28472, for the purpose of conducting a Regular Session.

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

Lavern Coleman, **Chairman**  
Chris Smith, **Vice Chairman**  
Giles E. Byrd  
Ricky Bullard,  
Barbara Featherson  
Brent Watts  
Scott Floyd

**APPOINTEES PRESENT:**

Eddie Madden, Jr., **County Manager**  
Amanda B. Prince, **Attorney**  
Jana Nealey, **Clerk to the Board**

**APPOINTEES ABSENT:**

**Agenda Item #1: MEETING CALLED to ORDER:**

**At 5:30 P.M. Chairman Lavern Coleman called the regular session meeting to order.**

**RECESS REGULAR SESSION and enter into CLOSED SESSION in ACCORDANCE with N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(A)(3) ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE, N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(A)(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, and N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(A)(6) PERSONNEL**

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Bullard made a motion to recess regular session and enter into closed session, seconded by Vice Chairman Smith. The motion unanimously passed.

**Agenda Item #2: CLOSED SESSION IN ACCORDANCE WITH N.C.G. N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(A)(3) ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE, N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(A)(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(A)(6) PERSONNEL.**

**RECESS CLOSED SESSION and enter into REGULAR SESSION**

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Bullard made a motion to recess closed session and enter into regular session, seconded by Vice Chairman Smith. The motion unanimously passed.

**GENERAL ACCOUNT:**

Attorney Amanda Prince gave the general account as follows:  
The board discussed two (2) matters of Economic Development, two (2) matters of Attorney-Client Privilege, and one (1) matter of possible future litigation. No action was taken by the board.

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Byrd made a motion to approve the General Account, seconded by Commissioner Watts. The motion unanimously passed.

**Regular Session resumes at 6:30 P.M.**

**Agenda Items # 3 and #4: INVOCATION and PLEDGE of ALLEGIANCE:**

The invocation was delivered by Commissioner Bullard. Everyone in attendance stood and pledged Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America which was led by Commissioner Floyd.

**Agenda Item# 5: APPROVAL OF AGENDA, TAX REFUNDS & RELEASES:**

**MOTION:**

Vice Chairman Smith made a motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Commissioner Floyd. The motion unanimously passed.

Tax Refunds and Releases

Refunds

Butler, William

Value: \$0.00

Year: 2024

Refund user fee. No can on property

PROPERTY: 00000

Account: 13-00714

Amount: \$0.00

Total: \$200.00

Bill#: 24930

Refunds

W T Rental Properties, LLC

Value: \$0.00

Year: 2023

Refund user fee. Double billed to Parcel 103046

PROPERTY: 00000

Account: 13-04514

Amount: \$0.00

Total: \$200.00

Bill#: 23689

NAME Fee	Account # Late List	Date District	Amount Released Discount	Property Value TOTAL	Year	Bill#	Property #	User
Butler, William 00714 \$0.00 3410 Old US Hwy 74 Chadbourn, NC 28431	13- 1/21/2025 \$0.00	\$0.00 \$200.00	\$0.00	2024	249307	00000	\$200.00	\$0.00
Refund user fee. No can on property								
W T Rental Properties, LLC 04514 \$0.00 7492 Banksiana Way Raleigh, NC 27613	13- 1/21/2025 \$0.00	\$0.00 \$200.00	\$0.00	2023	2368985	00000	\$200.00	\$0.00
Refund user fee. Double billed to Parcel 103046								

Agenda Item #6: **BOARD MINUTES APPROVAL:**

a. December 2, 2024 Regular Session

MOTION:

Commissioner Bullard made a motion to approve seconded by Commissioner Featherson. The motion unanimously passed.

Agenda Item #7: **PUBLIC INPUT:**

Columbus County Board of Commissioners

REQUEST #: TIME REC'D: P.M. MEETING DATE: 1/21/25

(Leave this blank, Clerk will fill in)

NAME: Hal M. Lowder

(First)(Middle)(Last)

ADDRESS: 314 S. Madison St Whiteville

TELEPHONE: 910 770-0040

COMMENTS (if desired): Re: 911 Comm. Center

NOTE: Thank you for taking the time to address the Board with your information and concerns. Please give this card to the Clerk no later than thirty (30) minutes after the commencement of the meeting. This will aid in a smooth and harmonious meeting, and, in addition, give more people the opportunity to speak.

Citizen Hal Lowder commented on the request to move 911 Center Under the Authority of the Sheriff's Office. Below is a summary of his comments:

I'll be brief—this isn't about our Sheriff. I have great respect for the Sheriff and appreciate the strong working relationship we've had. My concern is about the office itself.

From the city's perspective, we would like more input on 911 communications and better communication regarding changes. Our main concern is that with each new Sheriff, there's potential for the 911 director to change every four years, which we don't believe is ideal.

We support keeping the 911 Center under county control. We've spoken with other agencies where relationships with the Sheriff can change over time. In some cases, cooperation between fire, EMS, and law enforcement has broken down, leading to issues. Handing control to an elected official introduces the possibility of political conflicts, which could negatively impact operations.

We don't want to see the 911 Center become a political issue, so we strongly support maintaining county oversight.  
Thank you.

Columbus County Board of Commissioners

REQUEST #: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME REC'D: \_\_\_\_\_ P.M. MEETING DATE: 1/21/2025

Leave this blank, Clerk will fill in)

NAME: DOUG (First) IPOCK (Last)

ADDRESS: City of Whiteville (Middle)

TELEPHONE: (910) 317-4090

COMMENTS (if desired): 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

NOTE: Thank you for taking the time to address the Board with your information and concerns. Please give this card to the Clerk no later than thirty (30) minutes after the commencement of the meeting. This will aid in a smooth and harmonious meeting, and, in addition, give more people the opportunity to speak.

Doug Ipock, Chief of Police for the City of Whiteville commented on the request to move 911 Center Under the Authority of the Sheriff's Office. Below is a summary of his comments:

Thank you for having me today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak.  
Having managed a consolidated communications center for six years, I firmly believe that a consolidated center is the most effective way to run 911 operations. However, the best approach is to have a 911 director who reports to a board with representatives from municipal law enforcement, the Sheriff's Office, the fire department, EMS, and ideally, a member of the community.  
This structure ensures streamlined communication and accountability. When a single individual controls the center, decisions are made unilaterally, which may not always reflect the needs of all agencies involved. The 911 Center is the first point of contact for the public, and if something goes wrong at the initial stage, it impacts the entire emergency response process.  
If I have a concern and submit a complaint, and the Sheriff decides not to act on it, there's no recourse. However, with a board overseeing the center, complaints can be properly addressed, and resolutions can be reached collaboratively.  
I encourage you to consider establishing the 911 Center as an independent entity with its own director and input from multiple agencies. I would welcome the opportunity to collaborate on this effort to ensure the best path forward.  
Thank you for your time.

Agenda Item #8: PROCLAMATION – ADOPTION OF THE HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS MONTH PROCLAMATION:

Columbus County Domestic Violence Advocate Lucy Byrd requested adoption of the Human Trafficking Awareness Month proclamation.

MOTION:

Commissioner Bullard made a motion to approve seconded by Commissioner Byrd. The motion unanimously passed.

National Human Trafficking Prevention Month  
Proclamation - January 2025

WHEREAS: Human trafficking is a nationwide public health and civil rights crisis. Victims and survivors are everywhere, with Columbus County being no exception.

WHEREAS: Human Trafficking includes both labor and sex trafficking, with both international and domestic victims.

WHEREAS: Anyone can become a victim of trafficking. While women and girls are the primary victims, victims/survivors come from every background, race, gender, sexual orientation, and economic status. Traffickers target individuals who, for any reason, are vulnerable.

WHEREAS: Young people are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation but face many barriers in reporting what has happened to them. North Carolina became the 13<sup>th</sup> state to pass a “Safe Harbor” law that recognizes any youth under the age of 18 who comes forward will no longer face criminal prosecution - instead receiving comprehensive and trauma-informed services. This law seeks provides communities across North Carolina with the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively identify and work with sexually exploited and at-risk youth.

WHEREAS: We encourage victims to seek assistance from appropriate victims’ services organizations and the Families First, Inc. crisis hotline (910-641-0444). It is important to recognize the compassion and dedication of the individuals who provide services safely to human trafficking victims and work to increase public understanding of this significant problem.

WHEREAS: Everyone has the right to live free from abuse.

NOW, THEREFORE, Columbus County Board of Commissioners, do hereby proclaim January 2025, National Human Trafficking Prevention Month throughout the county of Columbus and urge our community to assist victims with safe and accessible services such as Families First, Inc. This agency will provide information and supportive services while instituting effective intervention and prevention policies. The County of Columbus strives to become a place where human trafficking does not exist, where people have opportunities available to them, and where all people are treated as fully human and worthy of a supportive community and freedom.

**Agenda Item #9: PRESENTATION - FY 23/24 AUDIT PRESENTATION ACCEPTANCE:**

CPA and Director of Mauldin & Jenkins, LeAnn Bagasala requested acceptance and presented the FY 23-24 Audit Report. Below are the findings outlined in the Power Point and a summary of her comments:

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Bullard made a motion to approve seconded by Commissioner Floyd. The motion unanimously passed.





Financial Statement Findings

2024-001: Reporting of Capital Assets and Related Balances (Repeat Finding)

During our audit for the year ended June 30, 2024, material misstatements in the current year activity of the County were identified and thus audit adjustments were required as follows:

- The County had four (4) construction in progress (CIP) projects that were completed in fiscal year 2024 that were not capitalized. The capitalization resulted in adjustment of \$55,679,885 to record the completed projects in the governmental activities and \$3,619,508 to record the completed projects in the business-type activities.



Financial Statement Findings

2024-002: Restatement of Prior Year Balances (Repeat Finding)

During our audit for the year ended June 30, 2024, material misstatements in the opening balances of the County were identified and thus error corrections were required as follows:

- An error in recording the opioid settlement revenue in the Opioid Settlement fund that should have recognized in the previous year in the amount of \$526,860.
- An error in recording the opioid settlement revenue in the governmental activities that should have been recognized in the previous year in the amount of \$13,247,220.



Financial Statement Findings

2024-003: Financial Close and Maintenance of General Ledger Accounts (Repeat)

During our audit for the year ended June 30, 2024, material audit adjustments were required to correct current year balances for the County.

- Adjustments were made of \$174,803 for the General fund, \$46,275 for the Ambulance and Rescue fund, \$45,828 for the Solid Waste Fund, \$15,087 for the Municipal Tax Collection fund, and \$13,188 for the DSS Representative Payee fund to correct the fund balance.
- Adjustments were made of \$625,193 for the General fund to correct the other financing resources for issuance of leases.
- Adjustments were made of \$175,873 for the General fund to correct the deferred inflow account for property taxes collected within 60 days of year end.
- An adjustment of \$171,253 for the American Rescue Plan fund to correct the revenue recognition during the fiscal year.
- Adjustments were made of \$10,252 for the Water District II fund, \$8,252 for the Water District III fund, and \$3,938 for the Water District IV fund to report amortization of the premiums on bonds.



Federal and State Award Findings and Questioned Costs

2024-004 Significant Deficiency over Reporting – Section 8 (Repeat Finding)

Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) are required to report submit timely a Financial Assessment Sub-system (FASS-PH): GAAP-based unaudited and audited financial information electronically to HUD. We noted the County could not submit the 2023 financial information timely due to the late completion of the financial audit, therefore we the FASS-PH report was not submitted in a timely manner.

Section 1.1 Audit Review Meeting Summary

(a) Firm Overview

- **Mauldin and Jenkins** is a large firm with over **700 government clients** in 2024.
- They operate in **six states** with **14 offices** and **18 partners**.
- The **same audit team** has worked on the fiscal **2022 and 2023 audits**.

(b) Audit Timeline

- **2022 audit issued in April 2024**
- **2023 audit issued in July 2024**
- **Third audit completed within the year**, making it a busy period for the finance department.
- **2025 audit preparation to start soon.**

(c) Audit Opinions

- The audit was conducted in line with **government auditing standards** and **generally accepted auditing standards**.
- **Unmodified (clean) opinion** received on the **basic financial statements**—the highest level of assurance.
- **Management holds responsibility** for financial statements, while auditors provide reasonable but not absolute assurance.

(d) Material Weaknesses Identified

1. **Capital Assets Reporting**
  - Four adjustments were required to correctly capitalize assets and begin depreciation.
  - Included major school projects (e.g., **Tab City, West Columbus**).
  - A specialist has been hired to improve **capital asset reporting**.
2. **Restatement of Prior Year Financial Statements**
  - Two restatements due to **opioid settlement fund treatment**.
  - A **statewide issue** in North Carolina due to a new accounting treatment requiring counties to record all expected settlement revenue upfront.
  - Adjustments will be made annually based on actual receipts.

Section 1.2 Additional Audit Summary (Continued)

(a) Material Weakness #3: Financial Close & Account Maintenance

- Upon reviewing the general ledger, auditors had to **post multiple journal entries** to correct books and records.
- **Key Adjustments:**
  1. **Fund Balance Corrections:** Adjustments were made to five funds due to keying errors.
  2. **Vehicle Leases:** A \$625,000 entry was posted to account for 14 leased vehicles.
  3. **Deferred Inflows (Property Taxes):** Adjusted by **\$175,000**.
  4. **American Rescue Plan Funds:** Recognized **\$171,000** in revenue for expenditures incurred.
  5. **Water Districts:** Adjustments made for **bond premium amortization**.

(b) Financial Indicators & Concerns

- The **Local Government Commission (LGC)** requires auditors to submit a financial data input form, generating financial indicators.
- **Key Concern: Declining Fund Balance**
  - **General Fund Balance % of Expenditures** dropped from **44% in 2022 to 19% in 2024**.
  - The threshold for counties of similar size is **39%**, and alerts trigger at **20%**.
  - **Action Required:** Commissioners must submit a plan within **60 days** to address this. Options include:
    1. **Increase property taxes**
    2. **Reduce expenditures**
    3. **Continue current operations (risk of state intervention)**
  - The county used **\$9M from the general fund** in FY 2024 due to expenditures exceeding revenue.

(c) Other Financial Indicators

1. **Late Audit Submission**
  - FY 2024 audit was **due by Dec 31, 2024**, but **issued on Jan 17, 2025** due to delays.
  - Late issuance was caused by **delays from FY 2023 audit**, which wasn't completed until **July 31, 2024**.
  - The goal is to **issue the FY 2025 audit on time**.
2. **Budget Violations**
  - **Three funds exceeded their budget** (disclosed in **Note 2, page 45** of financial statements).
  - No timely budget amendments were made to account for extra expenditures.
  - The county must **respond with corrective measures** to prevent future violations.

ARTICLE IIAudit Summary (Continued)

ARTICLE IIIAudit Opinions

1. **Yellow Book Opinion (Internal Controls & Compliance)**
  - Assesses internal controls and compliance with laws/regulations.
  - Not a legal determination but follows **government auditing standards**.
  - County received an **unmodified (clean) opinion**, meaning no major compliance issues.
2. **Single Audit (Federal & State Grant Compliance)**
  - Reviewed **seven grant programs**:
    - **Federal:** Medicaid, Community Facilities Loan, Low-Income Housing (Section 8), ARPA
    - **State:** SCIF funding for historic courthouse & sheriff's construction, State Aids to Airport
  - **Unmodified opinion for federal and state programs**, except:
    - **Significant deficiency in Section 8 housing** (due to a late report submission).

ARTICLE IVRequired Communications

- **Accounting Policies & Estimates**
  - No controversial policies; all in compliance with **generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP)**.
  - **GASB 100 implemented** (accounting changes & error corrections).
  - Estimates (e.g., actuarial calculations) were **reviewed with no issues**.
- **Management Cooperation & Audit Process**
  - Full cooperation from management despite **continuous audits over two years**.
  - No **disagreements or issues** with management.
  - Management signed a **representation letter** confirming data accuracy.
- **Past Audit Adjustment**
  - Recurring **GASB 96** (subscription-based IT arrangements) issue.

- Not significant enough (~\$156,000) to be included in financial statements.
- **Financial Statement Integrity**
  - Notes are **essential**; the full document should be shared without modifications.
  - Maudin & Jenkins remains **independent** from the county's financial reporting.

**ARTICLE V Management Points & Recommendations**

- **GASB 87 & 96 (Leases & Subscription-Based IT Arrangements)**
  - Leases now classified as **capital assets**.
  - Recommended **new capitalization threshold** due to recurring leases (e.g., rental vehicles).

Section 5.1     Audit Findings & Recommendations

(a)     Key Issues Identified

1. **Leases Added to Financial Statements**
  - **14 leases** had to be added as capital assets (typically held for ~5 years).
  - Recommendation: **Increase capitalization threshold** for leased assets to streamline reporting.
2. **Segregation of Duties (Repeat Issue)**
  - Found instances where the **same person initiated, approved, and posted** journal entries.
  - No errors detected, but **separation of responsibilities** is needed to strengthen internal controls.
3. **Personnel Policy Update (Resolved)**
  - Needed updates for **GASB 101 compliance** in FY 2025.
  - **Already corrected** after June 30, 2024.
4. **Outstanding Checks (Compliance Issue)**
  - Several checks **older than one year** remain unclaimed.
  - **State law requires** unclaimed property to be remitted by **October 31**.
  - County must **contact recipients or submit funds to the state**.
5. **Tax Reporting System Issue (Resolved)**
  - Past communication issues between **BIS system and general ledger**.
  - **Fixed before FY 2024 audit**; will not appear in FY 2025 findings.
6. **Audit Delays & Journal Entries**
  - **31 post-audit journal entries** were needed—an improvement from prior years.
  - Goal: **Reduce adjustments further in FY 2025**.
7. **Fund Deficits in Budgeted Funds**
  - **Seven funds (excluding Debt Service) have deficits**.
  - Needs **review & cleanup** before FY 2025.
  - Likely requires **General Fund transfers** to close inactive funds.
8. **Construction-in-Progress (CIP) Projects Need Closing**
  - **Second consecutive year** this issue was flagged.
  - Needs **better oversight** to close projects before audit begins.
9. **Inactive Funds Needing Closure**
  - Long list of **funds with little/no activity**.
  - Closing inactive funds will **simplify financial reporting** and reduce audit complexity.

(b)     Overall Recommendations

- Implement a **year-end checklist** to ensure key journal entries are booked on time.
- Continue **working on fund deficit resolution** to avoid LGC concerns.
- Stay on track with **GASB 101 implementation** and other new standards for FY 2025.

*\*the full audit overview power point and financial report is housed in the Clerk’s Office*

**Agenda Item #10: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – APPROVAL OF THE DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN COLUMBUS COUNTY AND THE COLUMBUS JOBS FOUNDATION ON A 38 ACRE PARCEL IN THE SOUTHEAST REGIONAL PARK:**

EDC/Planning Director Gary Lanier requested approval of the Development Agreement between Columbus County and the Columbus Jobs Foundation on a 38-acre parcel in the Southeast Regional Park as required by Golden Leaf with modifications approved by the County Attorney and County Manager.

**MOTION:**



Commissioner Byrd made a motion to **TABLE** seconded by Commissioner Featherson. The motion unanimously passed.

**Agenda Item #11: TRANSPORTATION – APPROVAL OF THE AMENDMENT TO THE LEASE AGREEMENT WITH FIRST TRANSIT/TRANSDEV FOR FY25:**

Transportation Director Joy Jacobs requested approval of the amendment to the lease agreement with First Transit/Transdev for FY25.

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Featherson made a motion to approve, seconded by Vice Chairman Smith. The motion unanimously passed.

**VEHICLE LEASE AGREEMENT AMENDMENT #1**

This Vehicle Lease Agreement Amendment #1 (hereinafter referred to as “Amendment”) made and entered into this 19th day of November, 2024 between Columbus County (hereinafter referred to as “Lessor”), and Transdev Services, Inc. (hereinafter referred to as “Lessee”). This Amendment is amending Vehicle Lease Agreement (hereinafter referred to as “Agreement”), made and entered into the 1<sup>st</sup> day of July, 2024 between Columbus County and Transdev Services, Inc. This Amendment is a subcontract of the agreement(s) between the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Lessor, for Project No.(s) 24-39-076. All other provisions contained in the agreement(s) between the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Lessor are herein incorporated by reference.

Witnesseth:

Addition to Article I

Leased Vehicles: The Lessor hereby leases to the Lessee the vehicle(s) described in Exhibit 1 attached hereto and made a part hereof (hereinafter referred to as vehicle(s)), upon the conditions and covenants set forth below. The Lessee shall utilize the project equipment in accordance with the procedures and guidelines set forth in Federal Transit Administration Circulars 5010.1C, dated October 1, 1998; 9040.1E, dated October 1, 1998; and 9070.1E, dated October 1, 1998, or any subsequent revisions or amendments thereto; the project description set forth in the project application and the Transportation Development Plan or Community Transportation Service Plan for Columbus County.

Addition to Article II

Terms of Lease and Commencement Date: The terms and commencement date of the Agreement shall be incorporated herein by reference. In the event of noncompliance with this Amendment and/or the Agreement, the Lessor may terminate this Amendment and/or Agreement by giving the Lessee 30 days’ advance written notice.

Addition to Article V

Repair of Fire Damage or Other Casualty-Replacement in Case of Theft or Other Loss: Lessee will assume full responsibility for any type of loss or damage to the vehicle(s) and it will be the sole responsibility of the Lessee to repair or replace the vehicle(s), if this becomes necessary. Lessor has no obligation for any loss in regard to the vehicle(s).

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Amendment to be executed in their respective names, by their duly authorized officers.

**EXHIBIT I**

The vehicle(s) referred to in the preceding Agreement to which this exhibit is attached are described as follows:

Description of Vehicles

Model Year	Model	VIN Number	Vehicle Type
2020	MVAN	2C4RDGBG0LR175776	Minivan
2017	MVAN	2C4RDGBG2HR597684	Minivan

2019	STARLITE	1FDEE3FS2KDC59758	20ft LTV Lift
2020	U4XE	1FDVU4X86LKB17597	Lift Conversion Van
2017	E-350	1FDEE3FS9HDC31979	20 Ft LTV
2019	S4XE	1FTRS4XM8KKA77143	Lift Conversion Van
2022	X2CG	1FDAX2CG1NKA69808	Lift Conversion Van
2019	S4XE	1FTRS4XM4KKA53793	20ft LTV
2015	MINIVAN	2C4RDGCGXFR719509	Minivan
2024	Starlite	1FDEE3FN2RDD33636	20 Ft LTV
2018	Elkhart	1FDEE3FS3JDC18599	20Ft Lift
2025	E-350	1FDEE3FN7SDD08432	20 FT LTV Lift
2025	E-350	1FDEE3FN8SDD08374	20 FT LTV Lift
2021	Starcraft	1FDEE3FNXMDC20591	20 Ft Lift
2021	Starcraft	1FDEE3FN1MDC20592	20 Ft Lift
2021	E-250 Allstar	1FDEE3FN9MDC09825	22 Ft Lift
2022	K1CF	1FDZK1C85NKA69413	Lift Conversion Van
2022	K1CF	1FDZK1C8XNKA70024	Lift Conversion Van

THE VEHICLE(S) CANNOT BE LEASED TO A SUB-LESSEE WITHOUT WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FROM THE LESSOR AND THE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION DIVISION.

**Agenda Item #12: TRANSPORTATION – APPROVAL TO USE COASTAL ARCHITECTURE FOR THE ARCHITECTURAL ENGINEERING AND DESIGN OF THE TRANSPORTATION BUILDING EXPANSION PROJECT:**

Transportation Director Joy Jacobs requested approval to proceed with using Coastal Architecture for the architectural engineering and design of the Transportation building expansion project. This project was pre-budgeted and funded by the FY23 FTA Bus and Low- and No-Emission Grant.

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Byrd made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Watts. The motion unanimously passed.

*\*A copy of the full RFQ is housed in the clerk’s office\**

**Agenda Item #13: ADMINISTRATION – APPROVAL TO TRANSFER OWNERSHIP OF COUNTY OWNED SECTION OF CHADBOURN PARK TO THE TOWN OF CHADBOURN:** Mayor of Chadbourn Phillip C. Britt requested approval to transfer ownership of county owned section of Chadbourn Park to the Town of Chadbourn.

*Commissioner Byrd made a motion to deny, and then Commissioner Bullard made a suggestion that the Town of Chadbourn has 45 days to figure out what to do with their portion of the park (sell it or etc.)*

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Byrd made a motion to deny with the understanding that the Town of Chadbourn has 45 days to figure out what they would like to do with their portion of the park, seconded by Commissioner Bullard. The motion unanimously passed.



January 10, 2025

The Honorable Lavern Coleman, Chairman  
 Columbus County Board of Commissioners  
 127 West Webster Street  
 Whiteville, NC 28472

SENT VIA US MAIL AND ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dear Chairman Coleman:

I take this opportunity to officially request that Columbus County convey property located along Miller Street in Chadbourn (Parcel ID 062220) to the Town of Chadbourn for recreational purposes. The Chadbourn Town Council unanimously voted on January 7, 2025 to request this property from Columbus County to combine with the town's 2 acres that is adjacent to the county's property.

I would like to thank you and the Columbus County Commissioners for considering this request from the Town of Chadbourn. If there is anything that I can do to help with this request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Phillip C. Britt, Mayor  
 Town of Chadbourn

**Agenda Item #14: ADMINISTRATION – APPROVAL OF REIMBURSEMENT:**

County Manager Eddie Madden requested approval of the \$400 reimbursement to Greg Hewett for beaver dam removal in Soules Swamp. Dam removal reimbursements were pre budgeted in the FY 24/25 budget.

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Floyd made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Featherson. The motion unanimously passed.

**Agenda Item #15: SHERIFF’S OFFICE – APPROVAL TO FUND 15 NEW PATROL VEHICLES:**

Sheriff Bill Rogers is requested approval for funding of 15 new patrol vehicles in the approximate amount of \$750,000 for the Sheriff’s Office.

*\*After a discussion regarding the previous recommendations from the audit briefing, discouraging the use of funds from the County Fund Balance, the Commissioners came to an agreement with Logistics Captain Robert Creech from the Sheriff’s Office, to order 10 new patrol vehicles as long as the total will be paid in the next Fiscal Year Budget 26/27. Due to the time required to ensure the vehicles are up fit properly, the date of delivery will be after July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 which is when the total bill will be due.*

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Bullard made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Floyd. The motion unanimously passed.

**Agenda Item #16: SHERIFF’S OFFICE – APPROVAL TO MOVE 911 CENTER UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE SHERIFF’S OFFICE:**

Sheriff Bill Rogers is requesting approval to move the 911 center under the authority of the Sheriff.

**Below is a verbatim discussion regarding this agenda item:**

*Sheriff William “Bill” Rogers Stated:* “ Ladies and gentlemen I was approached about looking to 911 Center some issues to it earlier in this year and I took it for Grant was looking into talking about and I was going to talk everyone about it we come for a vote but like I said I support what the chief says and we had a board there's no board there there's no accountability there's no communication with the police officers the sheriff's officers there's nothing there with the communication so I don't have to run it but like he had made a good point we need a board and somebody to run we can all talk to and complain to so I mean that's up to ya'll I just I'm offering my assistance and any way I can help ya'll with the 911 system I'm here to help any way we can do it”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” E. Byrd stated:** “Mr. Chairman at this time and I think we do need more time to study to figure out the very best issues that we need to correct and we know we're going to have a state of art 911 call center coming up before long so at this time I just put a motion on the floor that we deny this at this time.”

**Commissioner Brent Watts to Sheriff Rogers:** “Are you taking your, were you trying to take your motion off?”

**Sheriff Rogers replied:** “yes”

**Commissioner Brent Watts:** “oh you you were wanting to drop this”

**Sheriff Rogers replied:** “yes”

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard stated:** “I second your motion, there Mr. Chairman”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd stated:** “yes sir taking to a motion though I think we ought to act on it so it won't be coming right back” you know it's on the table”

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard:** “go on and act on it, it's already on the table”

**Commissioner Brent Watts:** “I make an amendment to the motion that we just let him drop his thing off of the agenda”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman stated:** “okay we got to vote on the amendment first?”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd replied:** “yeah you gotta get a second”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “Do I have a second?”

**Commissioner Scott Floyd:** “Second”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “Second by Mr. Scott Floyd, okay all in favor of the amendment”

**Commissioners Floyd, Watts, and Vice Chairman Chris Smith said:** “I”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “All opposed?”

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard:** “I”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “Ok, roll call madam attorney”

**County Attorney Amanda Prince stated:** “Roll call please, Commissioner Featherson”

**Commissioner Barbara Featherson:** “No”

**County Attorney Amanda Prince:** “Commissioner Floyd”

**Commissioner Scott Floyd:** “Yes”

**County Attorney Amanda Prince:** “Commissioner Smith”

**Vice Chairman Chris Smith:** “Yes”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “Yes”

**County Attorney Amanda Prince:** “Commissioner Byrd”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd:** “No”

**County Attorney Amanda Prince:** “Commissioner Bullard”

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard:** “No”

**County Attorney Amanda Prince:** “Commissioner Watts”

**Commissioner Brent Watts:** “Yes”

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard:** “I didn't never hear him asked to take it off the agenda, right then, he said nothing about removing it off the agenda”

**Vice Chairman Chris Smith:** “He did, he was pulling his”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd:** “I didn’t, I didn’t hear you ask to...take...”

**Commissioner Brent Watts:** “He said he was in full support”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd:** “of what they were recommending”

**Commissioner Brent Watts:** “Yeah, that he didn’t have to have it”

**Logistics Captain Robert Creech responded:** “*sent an email this morning to uh the county manager uh the clerk and the assistant County manager and then we talk to the chair we had asked taken off and they felt like needed to move...*”

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. replied:** “That's correct because the agenda deadline was last week we reached out to the Sheriff's Office and asked if they had an item to submit for this matter they said definitely they wanted it on the agenda and so we placed it on the agenda.”

**Commissioner Scott Floyd replied:** “was there a deadline for item line 10?”

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. replied:** “Sir?”

**Commissioner Scott Floyd replied:** “was there a deadline for item line 10 that we uh continued earlier table?”

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. replied:** “*again you have the you have the luxury of tabling an item that's at the pleasure of the board.*”

**Commissioner Scott Floyd asked Sheriff Rogers:** “is that what you're asking or you want just take it completely off?”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd stated:** “we don't want it coming right back up you coming...”

**Sheriff Rogers Replied:** “I'm not pursuing like I said I was asked to look into some things with and like I said I just wanted to work together for best of us so I will, pleasure of the board, whatever Commissioner Watts, uh Mr. Byrd, I agree with the chief then we just need to there's some problems there and we all know it I think so let's try to just take it off whatever you...wanna do I good”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd stated:** “This board and Mr. Madden we're trying to get those problems corrected”

**Sheriff Rogers Replied:** “yeah, that’s what I said, I am willing to help”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd stated:** “they should have been corrected earlier”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “and we all know they had problems and I think right now we're working on I think together we going to work together I think the people we got in place now are going to fix it”

**Sheriff Rogers Replied:** “yeah, work together, that’s what I said, we can all work together”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “We gonna work together. I think the people we got in place now are going to fix it. yes sir. and we're going to look at it. I think in just, I say a short period of time, maybe within the next couple of three months, we'll be able to see a significant progress in what's going on and it'll be a big...”



**Commissioner Scott Floyd replied:** “so clear the motion, clear the motion, we're taking it off, just taking off”

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. stated:** “That’s the pleasure of the board, I do not have that authority”

**Commissioner Brent Watts stated:** “I think Kay and them are doing good, give them a chance”

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. stated:** “*Can we maybe give you some assurance on that?*”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman:** “Yeah”

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. stated:** “I think hearing from Kay, on that, I think it'd be good for you to hear from Kay Stevens on this”

**Commissioner Scott Floyd:** “I think Mrs. Featherson misunderstood”

**Commissioner Barbara Featherson replied:** “Well, I’m not sure, there was a lot of chatter on the other end so. We are voting to take it off of the agenda?”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd stated:** “Well let’s listen to Kay first”

**Commissioner Brent Watts:** “well, we already voted correct?”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd replied:** “we didn't want it to come back ever you know 30 days 90 days from now because you got some fire departments and different ones that's been driving force behind this”

**At this point Commissioner Featherson asked a question that was inaudible and Commissioner Byrd replied:**

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd replied:** “not just take it off I mean, couldn't come back on”

**Below is a summary of what Interim Emergency Services Director Kay Stevens presented:**

"I'm not entirely sure what issues the sheriff's department is referring to, but I would like to have a conversation to better understand them. I have extensive experience in emergency services, and since returning, I conducted a brief assessment of the 911 Center. Overall, I feel confident in its operations, except there has been some turnover in the 911 Center, just like everyone else is experiencing right now, even the sheriff's office. We've been advertising, interviewing, and hope to increase our staff in the 911 Center very soon. It is a priority for me. We've also been training some of our other staff members who work in our department to be able to work in the 911 Center to help fill in those gaps.

For the past four years, I've been in Human Resources, and everybody is experiencing staffing shortages, whether in county or state government, or in fire and EMS departments. Everyone is experiencing staffing shortages. I can tell you that the state requires 911 centers to answer 90% of the 911 calls that come into the center within 10 seconds. I've pulled the statistics for the month of December, and we are under that state requirement. For the month of December, we answered 4,151 calls, and the response times were well under that state requirement.

We've not missed any calls, and we've not had to ask for any type of mutual aid assistance from anybody else. We have an excellent group of employees working in the 911 Center. They are primarily females who have made a lot of sacrifices, balancing their family and work life.

I'm extremely proud of our 911 telecommunicators. It is an extremely difficult job, but they do an outstanding job. These ladies—and one gentleman—are committed and devoted to their jobs and this county. They should be commended for their service.

**Chairman Lavern Coleman commented:** “*I agree 100% that we need to support them in every way possible.*”

They make many sacrifices, working 12-hour shifts. They are the first responders to any 911 call, the first ones on the scene before the fire department or EMS arrives. They may not have their boots on the ground, but they are the voice that gets the right information to the right people. Lives are in their hands.

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard commented:** “you know these ladies they work hard, they work more than 40 hours a week, make good money, but they are the main money-maker in their family, by these jobs and I support them and I think they do us a good job. Nobody is perfect and that's why I think they're doing a good

job up under the management that they have. We have corrected some problems and I support knowing that the county keeps things the way they are. They do not want to go under the sheriff's department because every four years the people works at the will of the sheriff. When that turns over they could lose their jobs and they got benefits now to where they can keep their jobs and I support them for that reason”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd stated:** “and I do to, that’s my reason”

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard continued:** “that's why I support voting it down and let the county keep it be done with that issue”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman commented:** I think the sheriff and everybody in agreement that it will stay with us until we approach the sheriff with it to take it over whether it be 10 years or 20 years from now I would say it is to stay with the county”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd responded:** “until you vote on that it don’t mean a thing, just speaking that you got have it voted on”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman replied:** “I am just saying what I believe”

**Commissioner Ricky Bullard continued:** “We have voted on it, we have two (2) votes on the floor, but I will put a motion back on the floor to keep the 911 Center as it is under the management of our County manager and our directors that we have in place that he puts in place”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd responded:** “what I think you let's include it's kind of like the Social Service Board it sometime it may come back to this Board of Commissioners to be that committee they talking about you know I've brought it up several times with different issues going on the 911 Center that were really problems that we did you know someone confided in me and told me about them I mentioned them here, Mr. Madden handled it and then uh you know I brought it up that they were one Department that we had overlooked to some degree as far as pay you know other departments all had moved pretty good but the 911 call center hadn't at one point you know I brought that discussion up what two or three months ago, yes sir so, I feel like that it needs to remain under the County Manager and the County Board period.”

**Chairman Lavern Coleman commented:** “I’ll take that as a second”

### **At this point all commissioners were in favor**

**County Edwin H. Madden Jr. then asked if he could add a little more information to what Mrs. Stevens gave and Chairman Coleman agreed that he could.**

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. stated:**

In 2024, our 911 communicators coordinated over 60,000 calls, including 9,457 emergency calls in just the first 17 days of January. They coordinated 458 emergency calls for service, 94%—far above the state's requirement. Those calls were triaged and dispatched to the appropriate agency in less than two minutes. That's outstanding.

So our question is, what is the issue? We all have turnover. The sheriff alone has had over 78 people leave his organization in a two-and-a-half-year period. We're down four people and are in the process of recruiting and filling those positions.

Our folks at 911 Communications are doing a stellar job. Beth is here tonight, and Kay has been conducting an assessment to gauge how we move forward. I would say this for clarification—our leadership has requested meetings with law enforcement multiple times. In fact, a committee was formed in September of last year, and the sheriff assigned Captain Richie to serve on that committee. These folks are our go-to sounding board to identify weaknesses and areas for improvement.

Do you know how many people showed up for that meeting? One.

We talk about cooperation—it's going to take cooperation because this is not something our 911 communicators can shoulder alone.

That concludes my comments. Leave it totally under the County Manager and County.

**Commissioner Brent Watts:** “I want to say something so my original motion a while ago was it against keeping the 911 like it was. My original motion, just for the record, was letting the sheriff take it off the agenda. I mean, I have no problem with what they're doing now I think they deserve a chance I think we were thinking the same what I'm think that was my original thing but there is one problem at 911, Commissioner Byrd brought it up but it's about one of them things like we just said with money them girls need more money. We know we're behind, we remember we brought this up, and I've had some calls from police Chiefs and all this new budget I don't know how we going to find it but they do need a little extra.”

**County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. replied:** “yes sir, I think our starting behind everybody I think our starting pay for communicators is roughly \$33,000 in other counties is more uh it's roughly \$10,000 more than that”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd responded:** “what we don't want is it coming back you know because a lot of this was driven by some fire chiefs and some rescue squads that had issues because of some of the changes we make and that's been a driving point with this and I want to put it to rest so our 911 operators know they're safe instead of one person or one group two or three people. There seven plus the manager that that's over it that's what I was thinking.

**\*\*There was some more general discussion of raising the pay at the 911 center and County Manager Madden did mention that they are getting paid a considerable amount of overtime pay. So if there is a cost saving to be done it would be to hire more people which would in turn lower the amount of overtime being paid.**

**Agenda Item #17: DSS - MONTHLY UPDATE:**  
DSS Interim Director Dwella Hall gave the monthly update for December 2024.

**Monthly Administrative Update**

**For November & December, 2024**

**January 21<sup>st</sup> 2025 Meeting**

**Happy New Year to everyone!**

**Public Announcement**

- December 1<sup>st</sup> was the 1-year anniversary of the NC Medicaid Expansion Program. Columbus County served **3964** residents.
- **LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program)** on December 2<sup>nd</sup>; LIEAP applications for adults 60 & older or people with disabilities receiving services through the NCDHHS Division of Aging began. This Federally funded program helps low-income households with a one-time payment sent directly to their heating vendor to offset the high cost of warming their homes during the cold weather months. On Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup> all other households may apply to see if they meet the eligibility requirements through March 31, 2025 or until funds are exhausted. The maximum payment for LIEAP is \$500; amount depends on the household’s size and income.

**Community Assistance**

This Christmas the foster children received an enormous amount of support from local venders, community partners, churches and the general public. The Salvation Army of Wilmington also gave an abundance of toys, clothing and shoes to our foster children. Due to the abundance of support, this year there was no cost to the County to provide Christmas to our foster children. Columbus County DSS would like to thank everyone for their support and most importantly our children thank you.

**November Collections**

Child Support **\$398,196**  
Program Integrity **\$4,458.00**

**December Collections**

Child Support **\$410,644**

Program Integrity **\$3,432.21**

*Respectfully Submitted,*  
*Dwella M. Hall*  
*Director*

*This has November and December numbered listed*

**November and December 2024**  
**Human Services**

**Adult Services (APS)**

	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
APS Reports Accepted:	8	23
County Wards:	27	26
Number of Payee Cases:	9	4
Adults Served APS:	1	?

**Children’s Protective Services (CPS)**

	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
Reports Accepted:	34	14
Reports Screened out:	19	10
Families Receiving In-Home Services:	31	27
Children Served:	55	50
Contacts with Families Monthly:	270	215
Assessments:	21	14

**Foster Care**

	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
Foster Children in Foster Homes:	72	81
Children Placed Outside County:	33	33
Agency Adoptions:	2	2
Pending Adoptions:	8	9
Total Foster Homes Licensed:	7	7
Total Children in Foster Care:	81	90

**Work First Employment (TANF)**

	<b>Nov</b>	<b>Dec</b>
Applications Taken:	23	21
Applications Approved:	9	5
Individuals Receiving Benefits:	99	100
Entered Employments:	0	1
Number in Non-Paid Work Experience:	0	0

**November and December 2024**  
**Human Services (continued)**

**Program Integrity**

**Nov**                      **Dec**

Collections for Fraud:	\$4,458.00	\$3,432.21.00
New Referrals:	0	3
Cases Established:	0	0

Day Care

	Nov	Dec
Children Receiving Day Care Assistance:	Not Available	
Children on the Waiting List:	100	120
Amount Spent on Day Care Services:	\$277,754.00	\$270,272.00

November and December 2024  
Economic Services

Food & Nutrition

	Nov	Dec
Applications Taken:	166	175
Applications Approved:	176	176
Active Cases:	6,159	6,254
Benefits Issued:	\$2,102,996.00	\$2,124,524.00
Participants Served:	12,137	12,303

Adult Medicaid

	Nov	Dec
Applications Taken:	140	113
Redeterminations:	320	229
Applications Processed:	72	157
Total Medicaid Cases:	16,06	14,730
Total Individuals Receiving:	20,902	21,255

Medicaid Transportation (NEMT)

	Nov	Dec
Number of Medicaid Transportation Trips:	1,040	909
Amount Requested for Reimbursement:	\$26,859.44	\$21,162.99

Family & Children’s Medicaid

	Nov	Dec
Applications Taken:	254	309
Applications Processed:	455	515
Redeterminations:	565	508

Child Support

	Nov	Dec
Absent Parents Located:	36	45
Orders Enforced:	903	902
Active Cases:	3,045	3,037
Collections:	\$398,196.00	\$410,644.00

Economic Services Narrative  
Darlene Jenkins-Parks, Income Maintenance Administrator  
Vacancies/Updates/Highlights for November & December 2024

- December 1<sup>st</sup> was the first anniversary of the NC Medicaid Expansion Program. NC Medicaid Division of Health Benefits reports as of 12/3/2024; there has been 589,222 North Carolinians enrolled into NC Medicaid Expansion; **3964** are Columbus County Adult residents between the age of 19-64. This has been a life changing milestone for these individuals to have affordable health coverage through NC Medicaid.



- **LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program)** on December 2<sup>nd</sup>; the acceptance of LIEAP applications for adults 60 & older or people with disabilities receiving services through the NCDHHS Division of Aging began. This Federally funded program helps low-income households with a one-time payment sent directly to their heating vendor to offset the high cost of warming their homes during the cold weather months. On Jan. 2<sup>nd</sup> all other households may apply to see if they meet the eligibility requirements through March 31, 2025 or until funds are exhausted. The maximum payment for LIEAP is \$500; amount depends on the household's size and income.
- **CIP (Crisis Intervention Program)** began on July 1<sup>st</sup> – June 30<sup>th</sup> or when funds run out, whichever comes first. This is a Federally funded program that assists households who are experiencing a heating or cooling related crisis. A situation is considered a crisis if residents are currently experiencing or are in danger of experiencing a life threatening or health related emergency and assistance is not available from any other source. The maximum payment for CIP is \$600 per application in crisis situation. Maximum total benefits per household cannot exceed \$600 per state fiscal year (July 1 to June 30).
- **Income Maintenance caseworker primary responsibility** include conducting initial interviews with applicants, collect personal & financial information about their current situation. Assessing whether client meet criteria for specific government assistance programs based on income, household size, and other factors. Verifying information provided by client and/or other source. Maintaining detailed case files, updating information as needed, tracking clients progress. Applying complex rules and regulations related to income maintenance programs. Explaining program benefits, responsibilities, and reporting requirements to clients. Conducting regular case reviews to reassess client eligibility and needs. Following up on all reporting sources to verify there is no changes in eligibility and addressing ongoing maintenance of active individuals. Identifying and referring clients to other support services as needed. Ensuring adherence to programs guidelines and reporting requirements. All programs are state monitored for accuracy and timeliness requirements.
- **FNS (Food & Nutrition Services) Intake/Processing unit of (6) IMC's;** (2) frozen positions intake & process all FNS applications received in the agency. Processed 176 applications in November & December.
- **FNS Review unit of (6) IMC's;** (1) vacancy; (3) frozen positions manage the ongoing maintenance on **average caseload of 831** (once vacant position is filled). Redetermination completed in November was extremely less than normal due to extension of benefits allowing agency staff to assist Western Counties with DSNAP. Redeterminations completed December 491.
- **F&C (Family & Children Medicaid) and Energy Program Intake/Processing unit of (6) IMC's** which (5) IMC's handle the intake/processing of F&C applications while (1) IMC with assistance of (1) Agency Interpreter, (1) Adult Intake/Processor currently intake/process all Energy applications. Processed 455 November & 515 December.
- **F&C (Family & Children Medicaid) Review unit of (7) IMC's;** (1) vacant; (2) frozen; (3) frozen expansion positions) manage the ongoing maintenance on average caseload of 1300. Redeterminations completed 565 November & 508 December.
- **Adult Medicaid Intake/Processing unit of (7) IMC's;** which have (1) of these assisting the energy program daily. The remaining (6) handling Adult Medicaid applications. This unit is back-up for the energy program as needed. Applications processed 163 November & 233 December.
- **Adult Medicaid Review unit of (7) IMC's.** This staff completed 320 November & 229 December redeterminations. In addition; they keyed 32 applications for Family Planning and/or Expansion approvals as change of circumstance at redetermination. Completed 43 Adult Budgets for F&C Medicaid review staff and received 13 referrals from F&C Medicaid to evaluate within 30 days for all Adult programs.
- **LTC/CAP/SA Programs unit of (3) IMC III's;** (1) frozen position; complete all intake/processing and ongoing maintenance for all (3) programs. The LTC program is the most complex and costly Medicaid program. Staff are required to determine 5 year look back period to check for any transfers of assets prior to applying for benefits. Applications processed in November 34 & December 28 taken. Redeterminations completed November 107 & December 41.
- **NEMT (Non-Emergency Medical Transportation) unit of (2)** receive daily calls requesting non-emergency medical transportation. Eligibility includes completion of new/updated assessments, scheduling vendor pick-up, and completion of vendor and mileage billing payment request in NCTRACKS.
- **Child Support Establishment/Interstate unit of (1) agents;** (1) vacancy pending new hire; (1) new vacancy effective 12/23 (2) frozen positions utilize telephone interviews with client/non-custodial parents as well as scheduling office appointments for individuals requesting assistance with establishing child support payments, conduct DNA testing for clients, children, and non-custodial parent on-site, complete cases for court action & attend court. Completed 95 cases November & 43 cases December for court action. Child support collections for November \$398,196 and December \$410,644.

- **Child Support Enforcement unit of (4) fully trained agents;** (1) frozen position. Staff see client/non-custodial parents in the office for case consultation in attempt to resolve as many issues outside of court as possible. Completed 232 cases November & 274 cases December.  
Child support collections for November \$398,196 and December \$410,644.

### ***HUMAN SERVICES BOARD REPORT***

**Dwella M. Hall, Director**

### **Vacancies/Updates/News for November & December, 2024**

#### **Intake/Investigation/Assessment:**

The CPS unit has a new Supervisor and I know she will be able to continue to move this unit into the right direction. At this time, the unit is facing some ongoing challenges as the department is down to one social worker and continues to receive referrals related to substance use, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and mental health issues. We have been approved to contract Social Workers through Vanguard until we can hire permanent staff. As of December 18, 2024, the after-hours unit is operating with only one after-hours worker which resulted in staff having to rotate weekend on-call duties. The staff has been supportive in assisting as the unit is down. Despite this limitation, the current after-hours social worker remains dedicated to supporting the foster care unit by conducting after-hours home visits, completing necessary courtesies for other counties, and occasionally following up with the in-home services unit. Additionally, the worker is responsible for processing and responding to CPS and Adult Protective Services (APS) referrals as needed.

The monthly Child Collaborative Planning Team (CCPT) meetings continue to take place, and the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meetings at the local advocacy center are being held as scheduled. The ongoing collaboration among team members remains vital to addressing the complex needs of the families we serve. Our Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit in November and virtual for December to review agency data, policy updates, and casework.

#### **In-Home Services:**

The unit remains fully staffed. Currently I H S has 27 cases and that is average for the unit at this time, which leaves the staff with a very manageable caseload. We still are housing a few Foster Care cases that remain in court at this time, but excited to see our caseload decreasing. Staff have begun to participate in professional training to enhance their professional development now that their caseloads have decreased some. This month no new petitions have been filed. As a unit, it is our daily goal to provide empowerment, guidance and encouragement for the success of the families that we are working with. Our Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit in November and virtual for December to review agency data, policy updates, and casework.

#### **Foster Care/Permanency Planning:**

The Foster Care supervisor position is vacant; this position is currently posted. The unit is comprised of seven positions, with three of those positions remaining frozen. Currently there are 81 children in our foster care program, with 33 of those children being placed outside of Columbus County. The unit continues to ensure that all of the children's needs and safety are being met, while simultaneously working with community partners, parents, caretakers, foster parents, and the judicial system to seek permanency for each child. With the help of local vendors, community partners, churches, and the general public, our foster children had a magical Christmas. Our Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit in November and virtual for December to review agency data, policy updates, and casework.

#### **Transitional Unit:**

The Transitional Unit has one vacant position Links/18 to 21. This unit continues to work caseloads while assisting the other Child Welfare Units as needed, particularly in the areas of courtesy requests (home studies and monitoring cases) from other counties, assisting with supervising visits and transporting children in custody as needed. This unit continues to assist particularly in the area of making monthly contacts with the children in foster care and assisting in finding placement when disruption occurs and when children come into custody. Foster Home Licensing continues to work on completing more licensures to help increase the number of foster home in the county. We are working towards starting a new MAPP class February 2025. Our Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit in November and virtual for December to review agency data, policy updates, and casework.

#### **Adult Services:**

The Adult Services Unit has five positions with one being frozen and one worker out on FMLA. This unit continues to serve ages 18 and above. We assist in areas of protective services, persons under guardianship, and special assistance in-home case management. In addition, we continue to have outreach situations and completing complaint investigations on Adult Care Homes.

The guardianship cases continue to demand extensive time due to severe and persistent mental illness and the lack of resources for this population.

#### **Work First Employment:**

This unit continues to be fully staffed. The unit is open for in-person applications. Telephone interviews continue for Work First applications, recertification’s, short-term services and benefits. Workers are able to conduct home visits to complete the interview process when necessary. Some application information is also being provided for pick-up in the foyer area of the agency. This unit will continue helping the foster care unit with transporting and monitoring foster care visits while they are short staffed. The Regional Economic Consultant continues to conduct monthly meetings.

**Child Day Care:**

The Child Day Care Unit continues to be fully staffed. The agency has continued to have a waiting list due to funding. As of today there are about 120 children on the waiting list. The unit is open for in-person applications and telephone interviews, and staff continue to complete Day Care applications and recertification’s.

**Program Integrity:**

Program Integrity continues to be fully staffed. Repayments are being collected. Staff continue to work towards cleaning up the backlog, establishing cases and repayment agreements.

**Agenda Item #18: FINANCE – APPROVAL OF 3-YEAR CONTRACT FOR DEBTBOOK SERVICES:**

Interim Finance Director Heather Woody requested approval of the 3-Year contract for DebtBook services in the amount of \$61,818.

**MOTION:**

Vice Chairman Smith made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Watts. The motion unanimously passed.



**RENEWAL AMENDMENT & ORDER FORM**

This Renewal Amendment & Order Form (“**Renewal Amendment**”) to the existing Agreement, as defined below, is entered into between Fifth Asset, Inc. d/b/a DebtBook (“**DebtBook**”) and the Customer identified in the signature block below (“**Customer**”)(together, the “**Parties**”), is effective as of the date of Customer’s signature below and amends the Agreement as set forth below.

**RECITALS**

**WHEREAS**, the Parties have previously executed the Agreement dated February 1, 2022 (together, the “**Agreement**”), as amended, which established the rights and obligations of each party with respect to the Services.

**WHEREAS**, the Parties now wish to amend the Agreement to renew the Agreement and the Services for an additional three years.

**NOW, THEREFORE**, in consideration of the mutual covenants and promises set herein and the continuing rights and obligations of the parties as set forth in the Agreement and the Renewal Amendment, the parties agree as follows:

**SERVICES & FEES**

Products				
Item & Description		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Debt Management	List Price	\$8,000.00	\$8,000.00	\$8,000.00
Annual recurring fee for DebtBook’s debt management software-as-a-service application provided to Customer through access to the Application Services	Discount	(\$1,000.00)	(\$790.00)	(\$573.70)
	Subtotal	\$7,000.00	\$7,210.00	\$7,426.30
Lease & SBITA Management	List Price	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
Annual recurring fee for DebtBook’s lease and SBITA management software-as-a-service application provided to Customer through access to the Application Services	Discount	(\$2,000.00)	(\$1,610.00)	(\$1208.30)
	Subtotal	\$13,000.00	\$13,390.00	\$13,791.70
Annual Summary		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Recurring Subscription Fees		\$20,000.00	\$20,600.00	\$21,218.00
Annual Total		\$20,000.00	\$20,600.00	\$21,218.00
TOTAL CONTRACT VALUE				\$61,818.00

**TERMS**

1. The Parties have agreed to renew and extend the Agreement for an additional three years beginning February 1, 2025 (the “**Renewal Date**”) and concluding on January 31, 2028 (the “**Renewal Term**”).
2. The definition for “**Application Services**” in the Agreement is hereby amended to mean the Products and other application-based services that DebtBook offers to Customer through access to the DebtBook application. “**Products**” means, collectively, any products DebtBook may offer to Customer from time to time through the Application Services, in each case as established in any Order Form then in effect. The specific Products offered to Customer as part of the Application Services are limited to those Products expressly described in any Order Form then in effect.

- 3. The Fees for each year of the Renewal Term are set forth above and will be due and payable on the Renewal Date and on each anniversary thereafter, subject in each case to the payment terms in the Agreement.
- 4. Any reference to the “Agreement” will mean the Agreement as modified by this Renewal Amendment. On the first day of the Renewal Term, this Renewal Agreement will constitute an “Order Form” as defined in the Agreement. Capitalized terms not defined herein will have the same meaning ascribed to them as set forth in the Agreement.
- 5. The express provisions of this Renewal Amendment constitute the sole amendment and modification of the Agreement by and between the Parties in connection with the Renewal Term. This Renewal Amendment may be executed in counterparts, including facsimile or other electronic counterparts.
- 6. Each of the undersigned represents that they are authorized to (1) execute and deliver this Renewal Amendment on behalf of their respective party and (2) bind their respective party to the terms of the Agreement, and (3) sufficient funds have been appropriated and are available to pay any Fees due under the Agreement in Customer’s current fiscal year.

Fifth Asset, Inc. d/b/a DebtBook

Columbus County, NC

By: \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Agenda Item #19: **FINANCE– APPROVAL TO SET A COLLECTION RATE SCHEDULE FOR MUNICIPALITIES:**

Deputy Finance Director Melanie Hester requested approval to set a collection rate schedule for municipalities.

MOTION:

Commissioner Byrd made a motion to approve the 4%, seconded by Commissioner Bullard. The motion unanimously passed.

Proposed County Tax Service Fee  
for Municipal Tax Billing/Collections

Prepared by  
Fina

The below listed information is a cost analysis of the services the Columbus County Tax Office provides to the Municipalities. Also notated, is the amount of cumulative funds received from the municipalities for this service during FYE 2024.

CITY	BILL COUNT	INITIAL BILLING PRINT	INITIAL POSTAGE	LATE NOTICE PRINT	LATE NOTICE POSTAGE	BILLING & LATE NOTICE TOTALS
BOARDMAN	166	\$ 70.55	\$ 99.60	\$ 14.11	\$ 19.92	\$ 204.18
BOLTON	500	\$ 212.50	\$ 300.00	\$ 42.50	\$ 60.00	\$ 615.00
BRUNSWICK	275	\$ 116.88	\$ 165.00	\$ 23.38	\$ 33.00	\$ 338.25
CERRO GORDO	163	\$ 69.28	\$ 97.80	\$ 13.86	\$ 19.56	\$ 200.49
CHADBOURN	1201	\$ 510.43	\$ 720.60	\$ 102.09	\$ 144.12	\$ 1,477.23
FAIR BLUFF	703	\$ 298.78	\$ 421.80	\$ 59.76	\$ 84.36	\$ 864.69
LAKE WACCAMAW	1627	\$ 691.48	\$ 976.20	\$ 138.30	\$ 195.24	\$ 2,001.21
SANDYFIELD	408	\$ 173.40	\$ 244.80	\$ 34.68	\$ 48.96	\$ 501.84
TABOR CITY	1663	\$ 706.78	\$ 997.80	\$ 141.36	\$ 199.56	\$ 2,045.49
WHITEVILLE	3204	\$ 1,361.70	\$ 1,922.40	\$ 272.34	\$ 384.48	\$ 3,940.92
TOTALS		\$ 4,211.75	\$ 5,946.00	\$ 842.35	\$ 1,189.20	\$ 12,189.30

OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED TO MUNICIPALITIES BY COUNTY PERSONNEL:		DEDICATED ANNUAL HOURS
**APPOINTED TAX COLLECTOR		1950
**PREPARATION & REVIEW OF MUNICIPAL BILLING PRIOR TO PRINTING		100
**COLLECTION OF TAX PAYMENTS FROM PROPERTY HOLDERS		1950
**PREPARATION & ADVERTISING OF LIEN FOR UNPAID TAXES FOR EACH MUNICIPALITY		40
**COMPILATION AND COMPLETION OF ANNUAL & SEMI-ANNUAL TAX REPORTS TO THE STATE		20
TOTAL DEDICATED ANNUAL HOURS		4060
**ESTIMATED AVERAGE PER HOUR EXPENSE (INCLUDING BENEFITS) FOR COUNTY PERSONNEL		\$ 36.75
TOTAL PERSONNEL EXPENSE DEDICATED TO MUNICIPAL TAXES		\$ 149,205.00
TOTAL COUNTY EXPENSES DEDICATED TO MUNICIPALITIES TAXES		\$ 161,394.30
TOTAL RECEIVED FROM MUNICIPALITIES FOR TAX SERVICES (06/2024)		32,094.75









Agenda Item #21: APPOINTMENTS/RE-APPOINTMENTS/REPLACEMENTS: STAFF is REQUESTING APPOINTMENTS, REAPPOINTMENTS or REPLACEMENTS to the FOLLOWING BOARDS, COMMITTEES AND COUNCILS.

Legend: EB =Entire Board  
Listed Zone # =Individual Commissioner

Zone I:	Barbara Featherson	Zone V:	Brent Watts
Zone II:	Chris Smith	Zone VI:	Ricky Bullard
Zone III:	Giles E. Byrd	Zone VII:	Scott Floyd
Zone IV:	Lavern Coleman		

COMMITTEE	ZONE/ EB	PERSON(S)	EXP. DATE	BOARD ACTION
Columbus Regional Board of Trustees	EB	Pamela Young-Jacobs (Recommended by the Board of Trustees)		TABLE
Columbus Regional Board of Trustees	EB	Jamie Godwin (Recommended by the Board of Trustees)		TABLE
Columbus Regional Board of Trustees	EB	Vacant		TABLE
Economic Development Commission	VII	John Blosser (resigned)	6/30/2025	TABLE
Aging Advisory Council	IV	Janet Hedrick (resigned)	6/30/2025	PATRICIA COLEMAN APPOINTED

The following is a verbatim discussion that was held regarding the Columbus Regional Board of Trustees appointments:

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd stated:** “Mr. Chairman uh we got Columbus Regional Board of Trustees they're listed as number three and I have a copy of the original lease that was done back in 1996 and was redone in 2012 and it purely states in there that the uh within 30 days of a vacancy that they have to give us three (3) names for each open seat and we haven't had that since, what year, 2015, and then at this time we just got one individual name for two different seats and then one vacant, so, I think I want to put a motion on the table um that we table this until our next meeting or maybe um meeting after next. Simply because a couple of things; number one um they haven't followed the procedure and number two is, you know, these appointments are lifetime appointments and Mr. Jason called me the other day and I made no bones about it I told mentioned it to him he mentioned that the board was getting a lot of age on them and that he needed to bring new Young younger people on I believe is what you said is that right Mr. Jason something similar to that and I you know if you if you make an a if you're making an appointment and you appointing for a lifetime um there's no way to bring any younger people to some die off or you add to the board and so you know if we're not going to stay with the um the three names like should be and I want to check in to see if there any way that these limits could be limited to eight years a minimum, you know, maximum of eight years, rather than a lifetime. You know, um the only thing I know that get lifetime appointments is a federal judge, you know, and I just think that's wrong because we all age out and uh I got a motion on the table to uh I mean on the floor to table it.”

**Vice Chairman Chris Smith responded:** “I think a big thing though, and correct me if I am wrong, you know is finding three (3) people”

**Commissioner Giles “Buddy” Byrd replied:** “you know no there's some people that's willing to serve they just don't have the opportunity and they're good people”

**Commissioner Brent Watts responded:** “being I’m on the hospital board so I kind of researched too after, you know, we got the paper like you did. I don't remember what year you come on here, did you say (*speaking to Columbus Regional Healthcare System’s CEO Jason Beck*) maybe in 2000 there was a gentleman agreement with the board?”

**Columbus Regional Healthcare System's CEO Jason Beck stated:** "this predates me and again you know we're blessed with the having a long tenure board I think I starting with your comment about the long board I think when you look at the complexities of Health Care and running a hospital I think you need more than just saying it's going to be to a finite uh period just because there's constant uh change complexities but uh if you go all the way back to 2000 and then 2006 um my understanding is that there agreement between both the Commissioners and the Board of Trustees was you know you looking at talking with three individuals per seat then you've got people that are you know being vetted to serve on a voluntary board only to be publicly you know two out of the three is going to be turned down publicly and by the Commissioners and the Optics of that and so at that time it was requested that the Board of Trustees do the vetting and submit the uh the single name for approval so that's customarily that's what we've uh we've done at this time based off the historical context."

**Commissioner Giles "Buddy" Byrd replied:** "that there again I've addressed a lifetime appointment you got members don't even live in North Carolina still on there"

**Columbus Regional Healthcare System's CEO Jason Beck replied:** "I think there's Nuance around that I don't think it's appro..."

**Commissioner Giles "Buddy" Byrd replied:** "I mean, we're not going to call any names, you know, like you and I mentioned the other day, but you got members that doesn't even live in North Carolina anymore still on the hospital board because a lifetime appointment and I really don't think this they should I think they should live in Columbus County period. I just think we need to sit down and can work it out, but I do feel like some changes need to be made. I don't know whether we can legally or not, but lifetime appointment is wrong, because your board is always going to be aged out three can't replace it that far into 11 that's what you got. Now you're speaking of just putting three on that don't heal the wound everybody that's on the board is 70 plus!"

**Commissioner Giles "Buddy" Byrd continued speaking to Commissioner Brent Watts:** "you know, hey now let me tell you what you are, you're the janitor because I served on that board"

**Commissioner Brent Watts responded:** "I served on the board Hospital been really good to me."

**Commissioner Giles "Buddy" Byrd replied:** "well let me tell you this, the decision is made and you're out...they come out and tell you about them. I've served on the board two times and what I'm trying to say, you're never in on the discussions, you're never in on any of the executive board discussions, you're outside, they're in the executive board...they come out and they lay out what they recommend. That's the way it served the years I was on the board Jason I was there before you were there as far as the CEO. "

**Columbus Regional Healthcare System's CEO Jason Beck replied:** "I expect my term as CEO and Chris and Brent, they can speak for themselves in regards to being informed or they feel like they have a say in what's uh what's voted on what's discussed so..."

**Commissioner Giles "Buddy" Byrd replied:** "Well, I got a motion on the floor to table it"

**Chairman Lavern Coleman stated:** "we got a motion on the floor the table I have a second? Second by Commissioner Feathersen, all in favor? All opposed?"

**Commissioner Watts, Floyd, and VC Smith opposed the motion and Chairman Coleman asked for a roll call. Attorney Prince started the roll call and Commissioner Watts asked the following:**

**Commissioner Brent Watts asked Commissioner Byrd:** "Now you're asking to table this?"

**Commissioner Giles "Buddy" Byrd replied:** "yeah let's have some more discussion we need to get in for research yeah table it bring it back at a later date yes and I don't mind meeting with Jason must well anybody but I think there's some points we need to discuss that we're not really throwing out here tonight you know we don't like to call names or whatever and so we want to have it more discreet."

**Commissioner Brent Watts responded:** "I don't think it's fair to throw three people's names out there and make two people look bad"

**Commissioner Giles "Buddy" Byrd replied:** "well that's where you settle it maybe somewhere else but that's in the original lease in 1996 there it is right there."

*Vice Chairman Chris Smith responded:* “you got two good people willing to serve voluntarily right now I mean...”

*\*At this time there was some back and forth discussion between Chairman Coleman and Commissioner Byrd about accepting the two recommended appointees and then discussing it at a later date or just tabling it and Commissioner Byrd recommended that it is just tabled until it can be discussed. Chairman Lavern then asked Attorney Amanda Prince to continue with the roll call.\**

<i>Commissioner Featherson</i>	<i>Yes to table it</i>
<i>Commissioner Floyd</i>	<i>Yes to table it</i>
<i>Vice Chairman Smith</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>Chairman Coleman</i>	<i>Yes to table it</i>
<i>Commissioner Byrd</i>	<i>Yes to table it</i>
<i>Commissioner Bullard</i>	<i>Yes to table it</i>
<i>Commissioner Watts</i>	<i>No</i>

*\*The motion to table the CRHS Appointments passed 5 to 2\**

**RECESS REGULAR SESSION** and enter into **COLUMBUS COUNTY WATER and SEWER DISTRICTS I, II, III, IV AND V.**

**MOTION:**

At 4:50 P.M. a Motion was made by Commissioner Watts and second by Commissioner Featherson to recess regular session and enter into Columbus County Water and Sewer Districts I, II, III, IV and V.

**Agenda Item #22: APPROVAL of WATER and SEWER COMBINATION MINUTES:**

- December, 02 2024 combined minutes

**MOTION:**

Commissioner Featherson made a motion to approve, seconded by Vice Chairman Smith. The motion unanimously passed.

**Agenda Item #23: WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT IV: APPROVAL OF THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WITH INTERNATIONAL PAPER ALLOCATING 5 MGPD (MILLION GALLONS PER DAY) FOR A PROPOSED WATER TREATMENT PLANT:**

Economic Development Director Gary Lanier requested approval of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with International Paper allocating 5 mgpd for a proposed water treatment plant.

*A summary of Gary Lanier’s comments below:*

*The speaker discusses the county’s future water needs, particularly in the East End, where well yields are low (130 gallons per minute) compared to other areas (300 gallons per minute). Given the high cost of drilling wells (\$1 million each), they propose an alternative solution: utilizing water from the nearby river. International Paper, which has a 50 million gallons per day allocation but only uses 25 million, has agreed to allow the county access to 5 million gallons per day. The county would treat the river water instead of relying on groundwater. To move forward, the speaker requests the board to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with International Paper, which has already agreed to the arrangement.*

*Commissioner Byrd responded by asking:* The question I have is regarding the water quality for those who lived in the village on International Paper’s system for years. The water was poor, pipes were corroded, and there was always rust in their sinks. You know what I’m referring to. My question is: Will you be able to treat this water sufficiently to safely mix it with our existing water supply?

*Gary Responded:* Mr. Bird, the main issue was with the distribution system, which is nearly 50 years old. We have taken steps to replace those pipes and meters. In fact, International Paper has expressed interest in purchasing 200,000 gallons per day of potable water from Columbus County if we establish a new water

plant. This would benefit both International Paper, whose water plant is aging, and the entire eastern part of the county.

Regarding Riegelwood and the village, that system was also nearing 50 years old, and we have either replaced most of the pipes or are in the process of doing so. The water drawn from the river and processed at the mill was clean, but over time, sediment built up in the old pipes, which contributed to water quality issues. Sedimentation occurs in any water system, which is why we conduct periodic flushes to clear natural deposits from our pipes.

A regional water plant—especially if it uses reverse osmosis—would remove particulates, chemicals, and minerals from the water, reducing sediment buildup in the future. However, it won’t eliminate the decades of buildup already present in Riegelwood’s old pipes. That issue is being addressed through ongoing pipe replacement projects.

MOTION:

Commissioner Byrd made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Bullard. The motion unanimously passed.

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA COUNTY OF COLUMBUS		MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING	or when work is completed.
THIS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (hereinafter referred to "MOU"), entered this 8th day of January, 2025, by and between International Paper Company (hereinafter referred to as "COMPANY") and Columbus County, a county corporation chartered by the State of North Carolina (hereinafter referred to as "COUNTY"),			Costs: COUNTY is performing the work at no cost to COMPANY.
1. Purpose	This MOU is entered into to outline the terms under which COUNTY will work with the COMPANY to establish a Regional Water Facility that will provide potable water to the eastern end of Columbus County to include the potable water needs of the Company. This MOU serves as a good-faith agreement to clarify the responsibilities, expectations, and obligations of each party. This agreement does not constitute a final agreement to supply water and shall be subject to a final water supply agreement between the parties.		Liability: COUNTY agrees to take all reasonable precautions to prevent damage to the property and will be responsible for any damages caused by their activities. Company will not hold COUNTY liable for damages arising from reasonable and agreed-upon work activities.
2. Scope of Work	COUNTY agrees to perform the following work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify a potential and mutually acceptable site for the establishment of a regional water plant on or adjacent to property owned by Company.</li><li>Design a water intake manifold capable of drawing three to five million gallons of river water per day from the existing COMPANY water intake basin adjacent to the Cape Fear River.</li><li>Develop design and build pricing for the completion of a regional water plant that will address water supply needs for the eastern portion of Columbus County. Designs of such a regional water purification and supply facility will include technologies that are used for the removal of PFAS and other forever chemicals from water drawn from the Cape Fear River.</li><li>Work to obtain grant funding and / or long term financing for the construction of the regional Water Plant.</li></ul>	4. Responsibilities	
	Company agrees to allow COUNTY and its contracted agents access to their property as necessary to complete the work.	International Paper Company, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Provide, subject to the terms of this MOU, access to the property, water intake areas, and appropriate technical personnel for the limited purpose to conduct the work outlined in this MOU.</li><li>Upon final written agreement which shall be negotiated in good faith by COUNTY and COMPANY, allow for the Allocation of up to five (5) million gallons per day of water from their current permitted level of water withdrawals from the Cape Fear River. Water withdrawal permits are those currently in place with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ)</li></ul>
3. Terms and Conditions	Access: COUNTY will have access to the Property, subject to all applicable laws and COMPANY site requirements including but not limited to safety and access requirements, for the duration of the work from February 1, 2025 to December 31, 2028	Columbus County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Perform the work professionally and in accordance with the agreed-upon scope.</li><li>Ensure compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, COMPANY site requirements, and permits.</li><li>Upon completion and upon final agreement by the parties, supply potable water to Company at a large user bulk industrial rate (rate to be developed at a future time).</li><li>Provide Company with all research and pricing for the various technologies used for the removal of PFAS from the river water in the event that adequate funding is not obtained by County sufficient to make a regional water supply plant a reality in the near future.</li></ul>
International Paper - Business Use			

ADJOURN COMBINATION MEETING OF Columbus County Water and Sewer Districts I, II, III, IV AND V BOARD MEETING.

MOTION:

Commissioner Floyd made a motion to approve, seconded by Commissioner Watts. The motion unanimously passed

Agenda Item #24: COMMENTS:

A. Board of Commissioners

Commissioner Floyd commented:

- I just ask everyone to be careful tonight with the weather and in the morning with the icy roads.

Commissioner Watts commented:

- I want everyone to be careful as well and I did notice that some churches have some warming stations, if you need it they are available.
- County Manager Edwin H. Madden Jr. responded Facts of life Church on Lee Street 7am-7pm. We are doing it in partnership with the churches.



**Commissioner Bullard commented:**

- This Saturday at Murf’s Pawn Shop (across from where the old Southern Tire used to be), there will be a Chicken Bog fundraiser for a young girl who was in a serious wreck at Williams Township. Her name may be Katie May or something similar, but many of you know her—she is currently in Chapel Hill undergoing multiple surgeries.
- Please come out and support the fundraiser by buying a plate, making a donation, and keeping her in your prayers. I follow her on Facebook, and despite everything, she’s always smiling—just a sweet little five-year-old angel.
- There may be additional locations across the county, so check Facebook for updates. The main cooking will happen at Murf’s, but the food will be available in multiple places. Spread the word, don’t forget to stop by, and enjoy a delicious Chicken Bog plate for a great cause!

**Commissioner Byrd commented:**

- We should keep both families in our prayers. In Bladen County, five people lost their lives in a tragic wreck—a 36-year-old mother ran a stop sign, and three boys (ages 6 to 15) along with a 6-year-old girl were killed. There's been a lot of heartbreaking news in the county, and we need to support one another during these difficult times.
- On another note, during my time serving on this board, I’ve never seen an audit report like this. As Mr. Madden said, we need to tighten our belts and get through the year. When we set a budget, we must stick to it—overspending is simply not sustainable, no matter what business you’re in. As farmers, we understand that, and I know the sheriff does too.
- It’s been a tough year, and we've had to make sacrifices—I even order one hot dog instead of two now. But moving forward, we have to focus on making sound, responsible decisions for Columbus County. We can’t make everyone happy, but we must do what’s best. Thank you.

**B. County Manager**

**County Manager Eddie Madden commented:**

- We closed our offices at 4:00 this afternoon to allow employees to get home before dark. I've already heard reports of snow in parts of the county, so we want everyone to get home safely.

**I'll be brief, but I want to inform you of the following closures for tomorrow due to inclement weather:**

- **Convenience sites** will be closed.
- **County offices** will be closed.
- **Senior citizen meal deliveries** will be canceled.
- **Transit services** will not be running.

However, key emergency services staff will be on hand. If there is an emergency, please call **911**, and our teams will respond accordingly. We've done all the necessary preparations, and the most important thing is for everyone to stay indoors, stay off the roads, and stay safe.

Thank you to everyone for your input and for attending tonight’s meeting.

**Agenda Item #29: ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOTION:**

At 5:15 P.M., Commissioner Smith made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Commissioner Floyd The motion unanimously passed.

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