

## **COLUMBUS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**Monday, April 21, 2025**

**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 the Regular Session.

### **COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:**

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

### **APPOINTEES PRESENT:**

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

### **APPOINTEES ABSENT:**

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

At 6:30 P.M., Chairman Lavern Coleman called the regular meeting to order.

### **Agenda Items #2 and #3: INVOCATION and PLEDGE of ALLEGIANCE:**

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

### **Agenda Item # 4: APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

a. 4/21/2025

### **MOTION:**

Commissioner Bullard made a motion to approve the agenda, with an add-on to the agenda for a National Pray Day Proclamation. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Floyd. The motion unanimously passed.

The add-on will be listed as Agenda Item # 7-A

### **Agenda Item # 5: BOARD MINUTES APPROVAL:**

a. March 21, 2025 Regular Session

### **MOTION:**

Commissioner Watts made a motion to approve the Board Minutes, seconded by Commissioner Bullard. The motion unanimously passed.

### **Agenda Item #6: PUBLIC INPUT:**

**Attorney Prince read a letter sent by Jason Elleby, the Mayor of the Town of Brunswick** - Dear County Commissioners, I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my concerns regarding the recent discussions about ending the collection of municipal taxes and introducing a 4% flat rate.

While I understand these decisions may have been made with the intent of improving financial management, we must carefully consider the potential impact on the communities we serve. Many municipalities, including ours, are already navigating tight budgets and limited resources. The proposed 4% flat rate could place an overwhelming financial burden on our residents and businesses, ultimately undermining the economic stability of our towns.

It is crucial that we prioritize the well-being of our communities over political maneuvering. I urge you to consider alternatives that do not disproportionately affect those already struggling to make ends meet. Let's focus on solutions that put people first, ensuring every resident has access to essential services without the added strain of increased taxation or fees.

I appreciate the hard work and dedication each of you brings to your role as County Commissioners. Let us continue to collaborate and find ways to support our municipalities while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your thoughtful consideration of our community's needs.

**Darrin Currie, Whiteville City Manager** - Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, for allowing me to speak tonight. I respectfully request that this statement be entered into the official record for the purposes of this meeting.

I come before you to discuss an issue that significantly affects the financial well-being of city residents and potentially impacts the level of city services. Since 2010, the county has collected city taxes on behalf of the City of Whiteville. At that time, an interlocal agreement was negotiated between the city and county, establishing that the county would bill the city \$3 per parcel for tax collection services, as stated in Section Two of the agreement.

According to the agreement, should either party wish to withdraw, a resolution must be adopted by the respective board, and a 120-day notice must be provided. This evening, the County Commission is considering such an action.

It is the desire of the City of Whiteville to continue this tax collection arrangement with the county at a reasonable rate.

First, I would like to provide some context on how we arrived at this point. On January 21, 2025, the Commission voted to increase and change the tax collection fee from \$3 per parcel to 4% of total collections. For the City of Whiteville, this represents an approximate 942% increase. Last fiscal year, the city paid \$12,375 in tax collection fees. Under the proposed rate, the cost would rise to approximately \$120,000 annually.

To break it down further:

- Currently, the city pays \$3.56 per parcel.
- The proposed rate would increase that to approximately \$35.32 per parcel.

The City understands that costs have increased and is willing to negotiate a fair adjustment. However, a 942% increase is unreasonable. Charging on a percentage basis forces the city into a difficult position—either cut essential services or raise taxes to absorb the increase. If the city raises taxes to cover the cost, the amount paid to the county also rises, compounding the issue.

This proposed increase equates to roughly three cents on the city tax rate.

The City was notified of this change by letter 10 days after the commissioners voted to adopt it. Upon receiving the letter, I sent the interlocal agreement to county administration and reminded them that changes to the agreement require a 120-day notice and a resolution.

Neither I nor the city had previously received formal notification of a desire to withdraw from the agreement. The email regarding withdrawal was sent to the Mayor and City Clerk on Thursday, April 17, around 12:30 p.m., just before a holiday weekend.

There were no prior meetings between the city and county to discuss the tax collection process or the intent behind withdrawing from the agreement. I had emailed the County Manager twice, dating back to February, expressing interest in discussing the matter, but received no response.

This issue should have been handled in a more professional and collaborative manner.

So, I come to you with a question and a proposed resolution:

Does the County intend to fully exit municipal tax collection services?  
If so, the City will need no less than 120 days to prepare.

**Attorney Prince** – Mr. Currie, your 3 minutes are up.

**Darrin Currie, Whiteville City Manager** - However, we are respectfully requesting a one-year extension of the current contract in order to allow for an orderly transition and proper planning.

**Attorney Prince** – Mr. Currie, your 3 minutes are up.

**Darrin Currie, Whiteville City Manager** – Thank you and I certainly appreciate the opportunity.

**Josh Ward, Tabor City Town Manager** - First, I'd like to emphasize that public comment should not be the first venue where interlocal matters such as these are discussed. Unfortunately, this is the only forum for dialogue between the units that has been made available to us so far.

Second, I respect that the board now intends to open negotiations with the municipalities, despite having previously accepted a recommendation from the administration to unilaterally shift from a flat \$3 per account to a 4% collections-based fee. While I would have greatly preferred that these negotiations had begun prior to the issuance of a notice of cancellation, so as to allow for a more manageable transition, I am thankful for the commissioners' decision to work toward a mutual agreement.

Furthermore, I want to acknowledge the administration's revenue-oriented approach. The county has several funding priorities, and naturally, any governing board seeks to avoid raising tax rates. That said, the decision to move from a flat fee to a percentage-based fee, particularly one as high as 4%, raises significant concerns for municipalities like Tabor City, Brunswick, Bolton, Cerro Gordo, Fair Bluff, Sandyfield, and Whiteville.

To illustrate: 4% of collected taxes in these municipalities equates to between one and a half to two and a half cents per \$100 of valuation. Collectively, this would generate approximately \$216,000 for the county, equivalent to a half-percent countywide tax increase, based on your Fiscal Year 2024 audited valuation of \$4.4 billion.

Looking at it on an individual level: the highest-valued property in Tabor City is Atlantic's building on Wall Street, assessed at \$1.5 million. At Tabor City's tax rate of \$0.60 per \$100, the total property tax levy is \$9,000. Under the current \$3 collection fee, that's a minimal burden. But under the proposed 4% fee, that amount would increase to \$360, a staggering 11,900% increase.

The point here is that while the fee is drawn from a municipal account, it is ultimately paid by the taxpayers of that municipality. And those same individuals are also county taxpayers. It is the shared responsibility of both the county and each municipality to ensure that taxpayers receive the best service at the most reasonable cost, precisely the intent behind centralized collections in the first place.

If the county already lists, appraises, assesses, bills, and collects for every municipal account, why duplicate those efforts? The goal is to eliminate redundancy and reduce costs for taxpayers. Changing the fee structure doesn't reduce expenses, it increases revenue. And in every transaction, when one entity makes money, another is paying it.

At this point, we find ourselves discussing a scenario where we're simply taking money from one taxpayer pocket to put it into another. So, as we move into negotiations, I look forward to productive discussions. But at the root of it all, we must remember: the taxpayer is who matters. And if they're just being made to pay one government instead of another, what is the real point?

**Commissioner Byrd** - What is the town currently doing about delinquent taxes? Do you have a contract with a third party to collect those, or what is the current plan?

**Josh Ward, Tabor City Town Manager** - If we need to go into that, we were deliberately told that the county would be taking that over, and that it would be in addition to the existing services.

**Commissioner Byrd** - But would it still just be 4% for collecting back taxes? Collecting delinquent taxes involves significantly more paperwork, more petitions, more filing fees, there's a lot more involved. I noticed that Mr. Currie didn't mention back taxes, and you didn't either. That's part of it too, collecting both current and past-due taxes. So my question is: what have you been doing about that?

**Josh Ward, Tabor City Town Manager** - We contracted Doug Ward as a tax collector to collect pass-through taxes on our behalf.

**Commissioner Byrd** – At about 8%

**Josh Ward Tabor City Town Manager** - Yes, sir, that was for back taxes, not the current year.

**Commissioner Byrd** – Right, 8%. But he was charging that rate to other municipalities. He had several contracts, and 8% was his fee for collecting back taxes.

**Josh Ward, Tabor City Town Manager** - It was 9% for us, but it varied depending on the municipality.

**Commissioner Bullard**- Just so we're clear and everyone understands what we're doing—I spoke with you, Dave, about this matter this afternoon, Mr. Madden. We've increased the tax collection fee for municipalities from 3% to 4%.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** – No, Sir. It's \$3.

**Commissioner Bullard** - Before, though, it was barely covering our postage, pretty much.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - I think, collectively, the finance director can tell you more specifically, but we were collecting around \$35,000.

**Commissioner Byrd**- And it was costing us over \$100,000, if I understand correctly.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** – What's that?

**Commissioner Byrd** - Mr. Curry and the other gentleman, the other thing is that the county has been giving a 2% discount to encourage individuals to pay their taxes in August. The county has been absorbing that 2%, and we haven't been withholding it from any municipality in the past. The 2% was part of an effort to get the tax money in earlier. Yes, well, he's the chairman, but I agreed.

**Darrin Currie, Whiteville City Manager** - It so happened that about 20 years ago, I was working on this very budget. Now, looking back at the budget, last year, it cost the county \$900,000 according to your budget on your website to give that 2% discount. This year, it's budgeted at over \$300,000. I'm not sure what the difference is, that's a \$700,000 gap. The City of Whiteville 2% discount, however, did make an error last year, and we need to ensure that we send the necessary documentation to the tax office. Everybody can make mistakes, and I understand that, but that 2% is intended to improve cash flow.

I understand the economics behind it, but that 2% is raising another million dollars. You're raising taxes by two cents. It's all smoke and mirrors, but that's all it is. Like Mr. Ward said, either we pay it or our citizens pay it in the city because they're county residents. I live in the City of Whiteville, so that means my taxes are going to go up, and it's just going to go into that pot.

There's no way in the information you all were provided at the last meeting that when you went up, it states there were 4,060 hours of credible time to collect those taxes. That's equivalent to two full-time employees collecting city taxes. So, if you do away with all our taxation, two employees are going to get laid off. What's going to happen to those employees? Are we going to lose two employees? For it to cost that much, that's two employees for a full year of collection.

We haven't been able to get that, so this is the only window. I'm sorry.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Well, one thing I'd like to address is that you were talking about the 2%, which was over \$900,000. I think the best information I've been given is that one penny brings in just over \$320,000 in our tax levy. Is that correct?

**Darrin Currie, Whiteville City Manager** – About \$400,000.

**County Manager Eddie Madden**- No, according to the last audit, that number has come down to about \$320,000 or so.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Yeah, about \$320,000. And, you know, like you're talking about extra employees for the city, the county has had to add extra staff too to cover it. So, I mean, it goes both ways.

**Commissioner Bullard** - But this is a benefit we're offering the municipalities. It's kind of like you're hiring the county to do that, and you don't have to hire us to do it. Each municipality could provide that service on their own.

**Chairman Coleman** - We'll go ahead and move on, and maybe we can get together at another meeting to discuss it. We'll try to set up a meeting, Mr. Currie.

**Darrin Currie, Whiteville City Manager** - As of now, we have no idea. If you're going to do it, fine; if not, fine, just let us know and we'll make arrangements. We just need to know. We'll schedule a meeting and try to get it started.

**Terry Mann** - Terry Mann, 203 Elm Street. Well, there are just a few things I don't understand about this, from a business perspective, and I'll be the first to say that the agreement was signed 10 years ago at \$3 per parcel. I know how employees are paid more, and costs go up, and there's no argument that there needs to be an increase. But switching from a flat transaction fee to a percentage fee is just crazy.

The thing that I question is how much more work is involved in regular tax collections. It's the same customers coming into the office to pay their county taxes. The only reason they would have to come back and pay city taxes is if they were short on money and couldn't do it all at once. There might be a few cases where the clerks might have to assist the same customers twice, but most of them come in and pay the entire amount at once.

God knows how many mail it in, and how many people have mortgages with escrow accounts, so the money is just wired.

I don't see how you can figure out how much it costs to collect municipal taxes when you're doing it all at once. Another thing I question is sending a letter dated, I'm not sure, the 10th, 15th, or 17th of February, and then making it retroactive to February 1st. You can't do business like that. How could you operate if you had expenses and then raised the fee, making it retroactive before it's even passed? I just don't understand it. It doesn't make sense to me.

Another thing is that it doesn't cost you any more money to collect tax payments from Walmart, with a value of \$1.3 million on the tax rolls, than it does from Joe Blow, who has a \$20,000 lot. It's the same labor. I know Walmart paid \$75,000 in city taxes last year at 4% of \$1.3 million, and it would cost us \$52,000 to collect. We would only make \$23,000 for the tax books. There are just a lot of questions I don't understand from a business perspective.

I know you can't do it at a loss, and I'll be the first to agree with that, but I just wish you would table this and let's sit down and at least agree on a fair price. If we can't afford it or if we think it's too much, we'll make arrangements to do something else. But the way this has been handled, and if we have to take it over in 120 days, I don't know if we can buy the software and train an employee to collect it. Your software might not be compatible with ours. How long will it take to download and implement? This would affect next year's budget, and by July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026, we may be out of the tax collection business. Give us time to make the transition, but coming up here today and saying that the agreement states 120 days isn't feasible in today's time to make such a quick change. I don't know how these smaller towns would ever make such a transition that quickly.

**Johnny Edge** - 470 Happy Home Road. I appreciate your time. I've dealt with two other county commissioners or county managers prior to Mr. Madden, and I've never been ignored or treated as rudely and unprofessionally as I have been by Mr. Madden.

**Chairman Coleman** – Mr. Edge, I'm going to call you out of order. Madame Attorney.

**Attorney Prince** – Mr. Edge do you have something new to say?

**Johnny Edge** – I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

**Attorney Prince** – Do you have anything new to say?

**Chairman Coleman** - We've been over this countless times, it's always the same. And I know the public is already aware of everything you're saying.

**Johnny Edge** - Well, I've got other things to say. So you're saying you can read my mind, while people in this county are being ignored and not given an opportunity to be heard.

**Chairman Coleman** - Yeah, stretch if you've got anything new to add, you can go ahead and say it.

**Johnny Edge** - I would like to ask that the commissioners hold an open forum for the people to voice their concerns, so they can better understand how the commissioners, the leaders of this county, can work more closely with the public. I can see, right now, that this is how you operate, and it is a disgrace, an absolute disgrace, to the 54,000 people who live in Columbus County. And let me remind you: an election is coming.

**Chairman Coleman** – Thank you Mr. Edge.

**Attorney Prince** – No more input.

**Agenda Item #7: EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT:**

Columbus County Manager Eddie Madden recognized Elizabeth Pierce from Emergency Services as the Employee Spotlight.

This evening's Employee Spotlight honors Miss Elizabeth "Beth" Pierce. She is with us in the audience tonight. Beth is a Supervisor and the Operations Manager at the Columbus County 911 Center.

Beth has served Columbus County for 13 years. Over the past year, she has gone above and beyond to ensure that the 911 Center remained fully staffed and that employees maintained their on-call status. She has consistently motivated and encouraged the telecommunicators to perform at their best, even under stressful circumstances.

Telecommunicators are often referred to as the first responders, they are the first link in the chain of assistance during emergencies involving fire, law enforcement, or emergency management. Beth has proven to be an outstanding leader for those working in the Communications Center.

In addition to her regular 2,080 work hours, Beth voluntarily logged an additional 592 hours of overtime in just one year. She did this to ensure that, despite being understaffed, the 911 Center remained adequately covered and operational 24/7 in a safe and effective manner.

It is for these reasons that we proudly recognize Miss Beth Pierce as tonight’s Employee Spotlight honoree.

Thank you, Beth.

**Agenda Item # 7A: APPROVAL of the PROCLAMATION for the ADOPTION OF NATIONAL DAY of PRAYER:**

Commissioner Bullard requested approval of the Proclamation for the Adoption of National Day of Prayer.

**MOTION:**

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

**Pastor Dave Heller** - The National Day of Prayer is a nationwide observance set aside across the entire country as a time to pause and pray, for our nation, for our communities, and for our citizens.

This year, the National Day of Prayer will be held on Thursday, May 1st. It is always observed on the first Thursday in May. Here in Columbus County, we will hold four observances at noon:

- On the steps of the historic courthouse in Whiteville
- At the Sheriff’s Department Annex in Riegelwood
- In Chadbourn
- And at the Visitors Center in Tabor City

We encourage all residents to come out. Each event will last from **12:00 to 12:15 p.m.**, making it possible for participants to attend during their lunch break and still have time to eat and return to work.

This is a meaningful opportunity for people from all walks of life to come together, to pray for our community, our leaders, our neighbors, and our country as we navigate the changing times in which we live.

We encourage everyone to take part, and we thank you for issuing tonight’s proclamation in support of this important day.

*National Day of Prayer*

**WHEREAS**, Throughout the history of America, we have poured out prayers to the God of hope; in times of crisis and celebration, in prosperity and need, in times of war and peace we have poured out praise to God for all He is, thanks to God for all He has done, confession and pleas for forgiveness when we have parted from His Word and will, and poured out intercession asking for His heart and hand to move for the sake of our neighbors and nation, and our history is filled with His grace, goodness, and abundant answers to those prayers; and

**WHEREAS**, From the first prayer of our Continental Congress in 1774, to the opening of every session of the House of Representatives and Senate, and throughout hearts and homes across America, the practice of prayer continues to seek God for guidance, wisdom, power, protection, and provision that has preserved hope and united us as one nation under God; and

**WHEREAS**, The National Day of Prayer is a Public Law established in the United States Congress in 1952 approved by a Joint Resolution and amended by Congress and President Reagan with Public Law 100-307 in 1988, affirming that it is essential for us as a nation to pray and directs the President of the United States to set aside and proclaim the first Thursday of May annually as a National Day of Prayer; and

**WHEREAS**, in our city and across America the observance of the National Day of Prayer will be held on Thursday, May 1, 2025, with the theme, “Pour Out to the God of Hope and Be Filled” based on the verse in Roman 15:13 that is a prayer and a promise, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit,” and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, We, the members of the Columbus County Board of Commissioners), do hereby proclaim, May 1st, 2025, as National day of Prayer.

**PROCLAIMED** this, the 21<sup>st</sup> day of April, 2025.

# *Columbus County Board of Commissioners*

## **Agenda Item #8: HOUSING AUTHORITY – APPROVAL of the 2025-2026 PUBLIC HOUSING ADMINISTRATION (PHA) ADMINISTRATIVE AND FIVE YEAR PLAN (2025-2030)**

Housing Authority (HUD) Director Rebecca Tyson requested approval of the 2025-2026 PHA Administration Plan and approval of the five-year PHA Plan (2025-2030).

### **MOTION:**

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

***\*A FULL COPY OF THE PHA 5 YEAR AND ADMINISTRATIVE PLAN IS HOUSED IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE\*\****

## **Agenda Item #9: ATTORNEY'S OFFICE – APPROVAL of THE RESOLUTION AND DEED for the COUNTY SECTION of the CHADBOURN PARK:**

Attorney Amanda Prince requested approval of the resolution and deed to reflect the new ownership of the county portion of the Chadbourn Park to the West Columbus Youth Sports Club Inc. for public use.

**Attorney Prince** - As it's set forth, I'll review it again to ensure everything is accurate.

The agreement specifies that for 25 years, the property must be used as a public park. It cannot be used in a way that excludes others, and it must be operated in the same manner the county would use it.

If the corporation dissolves or ceases to use the property as a park, ownership will revert back to the county.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Reading over this contract, Madam Attorney, I see that you've included the 25-year term. However, I didn't notice anything about how long the property would need to remain unused before the county could step in.

Should we consider including a clause that specifies a time frame, like if it's not used for two or three years, that would trigger reversion or review?

**Attorney Prince** - If you'd like me to make any changes, I'd be glad to do so.

**Commissioner Byrd** - I feel like there needs to be something more than just a blanket 25-year term.

I hope to still be around to help renew it 25 years from now. I might not be, but let's hope so, anyway.

I think the agreement should include a clause that sets a specific time period for non-use. The way it reads now, the property could sit unused for two or three years, or even ten, without anyone addressing it.

**Attorney Prince** - Well, it reverts if it's no longer being used as a park. We could specify that if it's not used as a park for a period of, say,

**Commissioner Byrd** - Two years

**Attorney Prince** - Three months.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Well, I think three months might be a little short. Let's just say a year. I think there needs to be a little more in there than just a blanket 25-year term down the road.

**Attorney Prince** - Okay, and if it's not used for a year, it reverts. After that, it would follow the 25-year period, correct?

**Commissioner Byrd** – Okay

**Commissioner Bullard** - Does it have to go the full 25 years?

**Attorney Prince** - It's a good number, most counties use 15 or 20 years, something along those lines, but 25 is a solid choice.

**Commissioner Bullard** – So this contract will be renewed every 25 years?

**Attorney Prince** - No, it wouldn't be renewed; the restrictions would be in place for 25 years.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Then the property would belong to them.

**Commissioner Featherson** - I understand the requested restriction, but I would say restrictions should be in place unless there is an acceptable reason why it is not being used.

**Chairman Coleman** - Then you would have to give examples.

**Attorney Prince** - You could say force majeure, but that wouldn't last for more than a year. So, if it's not in use for a year, that would account for that.

**Vice Chairman Smith** - Well, there's a possibility that something like a COVID year, or something similar, could come up again.

**Attorney Prince** - And the board would have to take action to take it back.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Yes, hopefully the board would be here to patronize that.

**Chairman Coleman** – Do we have a motion?

**Attorney Prince** – A motion with the modification.

**MOTION:**

After much discussion, Commissioner Featherson made a motion to approve the agreement with the proposed modifications, including a provision that if the park is not in use for a period exceeding one year, the board shall revisit or reconsider the agreement. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bullard and passed unanimously.

***\*A COPY OF THE RESOLUTION AND DEED WITH THE DISCUSSED CHANGES ARE HOUSED IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE\*\****

**Agenda Item #10: ATTORNEY'S OFFICE – APPROVAL of the RESOLUTION REGARDING TAX COLLECTION for MUNICIPALITIES:**

Attorney Amanda Prince requested approval of the resolution regarding tax collection for the following municipalities: The Town of Boardman, Bolton, Brunswick, Cerro Gordo, Chadbourn, Fair Bluff, Sandyfield, Tabor City, Lake Waccamaw, and City of Whiteville.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Commissioner Byrd** - Mr. Mann, I can understand Walmart paying \$75,000 in taxes, but 4% of that could be excessive. Maybe we need to work toward a system where there's a percentage applied, but it doesn't exceed a certain cap. Not every municipality, other than Tabor City or maybe Whiteville, has tax revenues at those levels.

So maybe we could come together and agree on a cap, where the fee or tax won't go over a certain amount. You know, like at a lot of auction sales, they'll charge 10%, but it's capped at \$500 or \$1,000, depending on the sale. I think that's something we could look at and try to negotiate.

**Chairman Coleman** - Madam Attorney-

**Attorney Prince** - The only reason it's on the agenda for tonight is because we have to give 120 days' notice. We're more than willing to sit down with the municipalities and work out a different agreement within the next couple of weeks.

**Commissioner Byrd** - So you're saying we need to move forward with this now, and then sit down to renegotiate in order to cover ourselves?

**Attorney Prince** - If the agreement can't be reached, then the tax office will be tied up with billing tasks, like sending out mailings and everything else they handle. I believe they send those out in July or August, so by then, we'll have hit the 120-day mark.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Did the letter that went out in January satisfy the 120-day notice requirement?

**Attorney Prince** - No, it didn't apply to the 20 days notice. Some of the items have to be done by resolution, and that's the only reason a resolution is included.



**Commissioner Bullard** - So we can approve the 120-day notice for the municipalities to end the old contract, and that gives them time to meet with County staff and set up a new agreement.

**Commissioner Floyd** - I withdraw my motion.

**Commissioner Watts** - But if we do that, like they said, and in 120 days we haven't worked anything out, we need to have a plan in place. We can't throw them under the bus.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Well, I think...

**Commissioner Watts** - That 120 days applies to Tabor City, but that puts both sides in a position where they might say, 'Well, we can't afford that.'

**Commissioner Byrd** -Then that puts both of us at the bargaining table.

**Commissioner Watts** - That's right.

**Commissioner Byrd** - But I'd say we need to do this and then come back to it. We're not just going to throw them out; if this is the last year, it will be done properly.

**Chairman Coleman** - We could negotiate, talk things through, and get it worked out within a reasonable time.

**Commissioner Byrd** - I think we need to go ahead and approve number 10, then leave it open to come back and discuss it. Do you agree with that, Scott?

**Commissioner Floyd** -That's fine with me. I withdraw the motion.

**Commissioner Watts** - I'll make a motion to approve the 120 days, with the exception that we work out the details with the towns.

**Commissioner Byrd** - If possible.

**Commissioner Watts** - If possible, we should go negotiate with the towns.

**Attorney Prince** - It is to negotiate new terms with the municipalities.

**Commissioner Byrd** - What do we do with this?

**Attorney Prince** - You need to approve it for the notice.

**Commissioner Watts** - My question still is: what if we don't negotiate it? What are we going to fall back on then?

**Commissioner Byrd** - But if you close the door and then the municipalities come in and say they're not going to do anything, we're stuck for the year, and we could lose another \$200,000.

**Commissioner Watts** - So you're saying you will go ahead and collect your taxes?

**Commissioner Byrd** - Well, I mean, yes. I think we would have to do that, just to be fair. But we need to approve this so we have room to work.

**Commissioner Watts** - I'll go ahead with my motion on that part.

**Commissioner Floyd** - I'll seconded.

**Commissioner Watts** - My motion is to approve the 120-day notice, with the condition, put in writing, that we will sit down with the towns to negotiate and try to work out a new agreement.

**Chairman Coleman** - Commissioner Watts made the motion to approve item number 10, with the exception that negotiations with the towns be included. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Floyd. All in favor? Any opposed? The motion carried.

#### **MOTION:**

Commissioner Watts made the motion to approve item number 10, with the exception that negotiations with the towns be included. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Floyd and passed unanimously.



Resolution to Cease Tax collections for Municipalities

WHEREAS, Columbus County is allowed by general statute to collect tax payments for Municipalities;

WHEREAS, Columbus County has entered into previous agreements to collect taxes on behalf of the Towns of Boardman, Bolton, Brunswick, Cerro Gordo, Chadbourn, Fair Bluff, Sandyfield, Tabor City, Lake Waccamaw, and city of Whiteville; and

WHEREAS, Columbus County and the Board of Commissioners wish to cease collection of said funds.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Columbus County Board of Commissioners that we do hereby give notice of cessation of tax collection for municipalities listed herein; and

FURTHER RESOLVED that Columbus County affirms that cessation shall occur 120 days after the adoption of this resolution.

ADOPTED, this the 21<sup>st</sup> day of April, 2025.

/s/ Lavern Coleman, Chairman

/s/ Jana Nealey, Clerk to the Board

Agenda Item #11: EMERGENCY SERVICES – APPROVAL of the QUOTES from WATSON CONSOLES for the 911 CENTER:

Interim Emergency Services Director Kay Stephens requested approval of the following quotes from Watson Consoles (this project is grant funded):

- a. \$142,925 for a console in the 911 center
- b. \$46,436.50 for office furniture in the 911 center

MOTION:

Commissioner Featherson made a motion to approve A and table B, seconded by Commissioner Watts. The motion unanimously passed.

BELOW IS A COPY OF THE QUOTE FOR 11a:

Bill of Material						
Project: Columbus County 911						
<b>Sold to</b> Company name: Columbus County 911 Contact Person: Robert Gilbert Contact Phone: 9106411822 Contact Fax:					<b>Distributor</b> Company name: King Carter & Associates, Inc Salesperson: King Carter Jr. Salesperson Phone: 7046086863 Salesperson Fax:	
					26246 Twelve Trees Lane NW Poulton, WA 98370 360.394.1300 watsonfurniture.com	
#	Qty	Part Number	Description		Sell	Ext. Sell
<b>Main 01</b>						
1	4	DADL	DUAL LOCK - SET OF THREE		\$35.00	\$140.00
2	2	HD6AH243918L-N	MERCURY CORNER/COMMAND HUB, 24"D X 39"W 18"H, LEFT HAND, NO GROMMET		\$1,235.00	\$2,470.00
3	2	HD6AH243918R-N	MERCURY CORNER/COMMAND HUB, 24"D X 39"W 18"H, RIGHT HAND, NO GROMMET		\$1,235.00	\$2,470.00
4	4	HD6AT90S48-N	MERCURY CORNER SINGLE TECH BRIDGE, FOR A 90DEG X 48"W CONSOLE, NO GROMMET		\$2,105.00	\$8,420.00
5	4	HD6AW9048D	MERCURY CORNER WORKSURFACE 90 DEG x 48"W, 24-50"H, DUAL TIER ARRAY		\$6,965.00	\$27,860.00
6	2	HD6W3684D	MERCURY PRO WORKSURFACE WITH DEPTH ADJUSTMENT, 36"D x 84"W x 24-50"H, WITH CONTOUR EDGE, DUAL TIER ARRAY		\$7,005.00	\$14,010.00
7	2	HG6TS84N	MERCURY TECH BRIDGE, SINGLE SIDED 12" D X 18"H, FOR A 84"W CONSOLE, NO GROMMET		\$800.00	\$1,600.00
8	2	HGA	MERCURY ARRAY		\$805.00	\$1,610.00
9	2	HGA	MERCURY ARRAY		\$1,610.00	\$3,220.00
10	4	HGAC9048	MERCURY CORNER ARRAY 90 DEG x 48"W		\$885.00	\$3,540.00
11	4	HGAC9048	MERCURY CORNER ARRAY 90 DEG x 48"W		\$1,405.00	\$5,620.00
12	4	HGAS90S6448FAC	MERCURY CORNER SINGLE SPINE SCREEN, 90 DEG 54"H X 48"W, FABRIC AND 12" CLEAR ACRYLIC		\$1,780.00	\$7,120.00
13	2	HGBS2418S-L	MERCURY BRIDGE SPACER, 24"D x 18"H SINGLE, LEFT HAND		\$95.00	\$190.00
14	2	HGBS2418S-R	MERCURY BRIDGE SPACER, 24"D x 18"H SINGLE, RIGHT HAND		\$95.00	\$190.00
15	4	HGETSFT3942S	MERCURY END STACKING TECH STORAGE FULL TECH, 11.375"D X 39"W X 42"H, SINGLE		\$850.00	\$3,400.00
16	2	HGSOCBKT42L	MERCURY OUTSIDE CORNER BRACKET, 42"H		\$40.00	\$80.00
17	2	HGSOCBKT42R	MERCURY OUTSIDE CORNER BRACKET, 42"H		\$40.00	\$80.00
18	2	HGSRE3954FAC	MERCURY RETURN SCREEN, SINGLE FABRIC PANEL AND CLEAR ACRYLIC, 39"W x 54"H		\$720.00	\$1,440.00
19	2	HGSRE3954FAC	MERCURY RETURN SCREEN, SINGLE FABRIC PANEL AND CLEAR ACRYLIC, 39"W x 54"H		\$720.00	\$1,440.00
20	2	HGSS8454FAC	MERCURY SPINE SCREEN, 84"W x 54"H, FABRIC AND 12" CLEAR ACRYLIC		\$1,495.00	\$2,990.00
21	4	HGTD2SCR4254FAC	MERCURY TEAM DESK SPINE SCREEN, FABRIC AND CLEAR ACRYLIC, 42"W X 54"H, FOR A TEAM DESK, CENTER		\$720.00	\$2,880.00
22	4	HGTD2SRF3942	MERCURY TEAM DESK SURFACE, RECTANGLE TOP FOR A TEAM DESK, 39"D x 42"W x 31.5"H, LEFT, CENTER, OR RIGHT		\$455.00	\$1,820.00
23	4	HGTD2STR42	MERCURY TEAM DESK STORAGE BASE TECH, FOR A 42W TEAM DESK		\$1,350.00	\$5,400.00
24	4	HGTDBRDGSS42-C	MERCURY TEAM DESK SINGLE STORAGE BRIDGE, FOR A 42W TEAM DESK, CENTER		\$375.00	\$1,500.00
25	2	HGTDLHUBA	MERCURY TEAM DESK LEFT HUB CORNER/COMMAND, FOR A TEAM DESK		\$1,375.00	\$2,750.00
26	2	HGTDLHUBP	MERCURY TEAM DESK LEFT HUB PRO, FOR A TEAM DESK		\$1,640.00	\$3,280.00
27	2	HGTDRLHUBA	MERCURY TEAM DESK RIGHT HUB CORNER/COMMAND, FOR A TEAM DESK		\$1,375.00	\$2,750.00
28	2	HGTDRLHUBP	MERCURY TEAM DESK RIGHT HUB PRO, FOR A TEAM DESK		\$1,640.00	\$3,280.00
29	4	HHC2418	MERCURY HUB COVER, 24"D x 18"H		\$60.00	\$240.00
30	1	MAGRM	MIRO GROMMET (FIELD INSTALLED)		\$65.00	\$65.00
31	1	TOPO3660	TOP ONLY, 36"D X 60"W, EXACT SIZE		\$470.00	\$470.00
32	6	TXXTTECHAUDIO25	TECH LINK, 3.5MM STEREO AUDIO JACK, BLACK, 25' CORD		\$35.00	\$210.00
33	12	TXXTTECHDATA25	TECH LINK, CAT6 / RJ45, DATA, BLACK, 25' CORD		\$60.00	\$720.00
34	36	TXXTTECHUSB15	TECH LINK, SINGLE USB A, DATA, BLACK, 15' CORD		\$40.00	\$1,440.00

Bill of Material

Project: Columbus County 911

**Sold to**  
Company name: Columbus County 911  
Contact Person: Robert Gilbert  
Contact Phone: 9106411822  
Contact Fax:

**Distributor**  
Company name: King Carter & Associates, Inc  
Salesperson: King Carter Jr.  
Salesperson Phone: 7046086863  
Salesperson Fax:



#	Qty	Part Number	Description	Sell	Ext. Sell
35	6	TTXTECHUSBP-ACB	TECH LINK, USB A+C, CHARGER, BLACK	\$140.00	\$840.00
36	1	WAKEY-STD	MASTER KEY, STANDARD LOCK (082000)	\$35.00	\$35.00
37	1	WELCOMEPACKET	WATSON CONSOLES WELCOME PACKET	\$0.00	\$0.00
38	2	ZSBKD153642	ZO STORAGE BOOKCASE, DOORS, 15"D X 36"W X 42"H	\$805.00	\$1,610.00
39	2	ZSBKOA153042	ZO STORAGE BOOKCASE, ADJUSTABLE SHELF, OPEN, 15"D X 30"W X 42"H	\$545.00	\$1,090.00
				<b>Total Main 01</b>	<b>\$118,270.00</b>

Product Subtotal

Watson Installation

Grand Total

\$118,270.00

\$24,655.00

\$142,925.00

Agenda Item #12: EMERGENCY SERVICES – ACCEPTANCE of the \$15,000 HAZARDOUS MATERIAL EMERGENCY PLANNING GRANT (HMEP) AWARD and PROJECT ORDINANCE:

Interim Emergency Services Director Kay Stephens requested acceptance of the Hazardous Material Emergency Planning Grant (HMEP) Award in the amount of \$15,000, and the associated project ordinance.

MOTION:

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

*\*A COPY OF THE MOA ASSOCIATED WITH THE HMEP GRANT AWARD IS HOUSED IN THE CLERK’S OFFICE\**

COLUMBUS COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

Ordinance making appropriations to the Columbus County Emergency Management Hazardous Materials Emergency Preparedness Grant Fund

for the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2024

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Columbus County, North Carolina as follows:

**Section 1:** The following amounts are hereby made to the Columbus County Emergency Management Hazardous Material Emergency Preparedness Grant Fund pursuant to G.S. 159 -13.2 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024.

Source of Revenue			Budget
	55-3471-432330	HMEP GRANT CFDA# 20.703	\$ 15,000.00
Total Estimated Revenues			\$ 15,000.00
Project Appropriations			
	55-4362-539500	TRAINING	\$ 15,000.00
Total Project Appropriations			\$ 15,000.00

**Description:** The Hazardous Material Emergency Planning Grant was awarded to provide training/education, of hazardous materials, to local first responders.

**Section 2:** The project undertaken pursuant to this ordinance is in accordance with the Recommended Budget and any changes made during the County Commissioners' budget work sessions.

**Section 3:** The Finance Director is hereby directed to maintain within the Project Fund sufficient specific detailed accounting records to satisfy all applicable regulations. The terms of any financing agreement also shall be met.

**Section 4:** The County desires to expend its own funds for the purpose of paying certain costs of various projects, for which expenditures the County reasonably expects to reimburse itself from the proceeds of debt to be incurred by the County.

**Section 5:** All expenditures relating to obtaining any bond referendum and or installment purchase will be reimbursed

from bond proceeds and installment purchase proceeds in accordance with the requirements of the United States Treasury Regulations Section 1.150 -2.

**Section 6:** This declaration of official intent is made pursuant to Section 1.150-2 of the Treasury Regulations to expressly declare the official intent of the County to reimburse itself from the proceeds of debt to be hereinafter incurred by the County for certain expenditures paid by the County on or after the date which is sixty (60) days prior to the date hereof.

**Section 7:** The County intends to seek Federal, State, and/or other grant funding to reduce the amount of loan proceeds. The adoption of this ordinance authorizes the County Manager and/or his representative to apply for and accept such funding if awarded.

**Section 8:** This project ordinance shall be entered in the minutes of the Board of Commissioners of Columbus County. Within five days hereof, copies of this ordinance shall be filed with the finance office in Columbus County, and with the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners of Columbus County. Copies of the Project Ordinance shall be made available to the Budget Officer, the Project Manager, and the Finance Officer for direction in carrying out this project.

**Agenda Item #13: HEALTH SERVICES – APPROVAL of the CONTRACT EXTENSION with the CAROLINAS PHYSICIAN NETWORK to COVER WOMEN’S HEALTH (MATERNITY) CLINIC:**

Health Services Director Daniel Buck requested approval of the contract extension with the Carolinas Physician Network to cover the women’s health (maternity) clinic.

**MOTION:**

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

**SECOND AMENDMENT  
TO AGREEMENT  
BETWEEN  
COUNTY OF COLUMBUS  
AND  
CAROLINAS PHYSICIANS NETWORK, INC.  
(OB/GYN Services)**

This Second Amendment to the Agreement (this “Amendment”) executed this \_\_\_\_ day of April, 2025, with intent to be effective as of April 1, 2025 (“Effective Date”), is by and between **COUNTY OF COLUMBUS** (“County”), and **CAROLINAS PHYSICIANS NETWORK, INC.** (the “CPN”). This Amendment amends the Agreement, dated effective April 1, 2023, by and between County and CPN, as amended (the “Agreement”).

Client and Atrium entered in the Agreement, pursuant to which CPN provides certain medical services to County. The parties now desire to amend the Agreement as set forth herein. All capitalized terms used and not otherwise defined in this Amendment have the meanings assigned to them in the Agreement.

The parties agree as follows:

1. Amendment of Agreement. As of the Effective Date, the Agreement is hereby amended as follows:
- (a) Extension of Term. The parties agree to extend the term of the Agreement for one additional three-year period, commencing April 1, 2025 and expiring March 31, 2028. The parties may agree to further extend the Agreement by way of additional amendments to the Agreement signed by authorized representatives of the parties.

2. Miscellaneous.

(a) Severability. If any portion of this Amendment is held to be invalid, illegal or unenforceable, then this Amendment is to be construed as if the invalid, illegal or unenforceable provision had never been contained in this Amendment.

(b) Counterparts. This Amendment may be executed in counterparts, each of which is an original and all of which together are deemed one and the same instrument.

(c) Drafting Conventions. This Amendment is to be construed according to the following principles: (a) the captions of the sections in this Amendment are provided for convenience only and do not affect its meaning; (b) the words “party” and “parties” refer only to a named party to this Amendment; (c) the word “includes” and its syntactic variants mean “includes, but is not limited to” and corresponding syntactic variant expressions; and (d) unless specified otherwise, any reference to a statute or regulation means that statute or regulation as amended or supplemented from time to time and any corresponding provisions of successor statutes or regulations.

(d) Governing Law. The internal laws and judicial decisions of the State of North Carolina govern all matters arising out of this Amendment.
- [signature page follows]
- Second Amendment to OBGYN Agreement – County of Columbus and CPN (gsk)
- Agenda Item #14: MONTHLY REPORT for MARCH 2025:**
- DSS Director Dwella Hall presented the DSS monthly report for March 2025.
- Economic Services Board Report**
- Darlene Jenkins-Parks, Income Maintenance Administrator**
- Vacancies/Updates/News for March 2025**

**Medicaid Health Plans Resource** event was held on Thursday March 27<sup>th</sup> giving opportunity for the agency staff and public to speak with a representative from all five Medicaid Healthcare plans; Carolina Complete Health, Healthy Blue, United Health Care, Well Care, & AmeriHealth Caritas. In addition; representatives with Trillium Health Resources, NC Medicaid Ombudsman, NC Medicaid Enrollment Broker, Cape Fear Hop (Healthy Opportunities Program), Community Cape Fear Lower Cape Fear, Coastal Horizons Flourishing Families, and Coastal Horizons Center Inc. Child & Adolescent were available. The event was a success and lots of valuable information shared.

**Medicaid State REDA Audit** ended with the March case review; that began June 2024.

Each month the auditor reviewed 20 Medicaid cases selected randomly. Included 10 approvals and 10 denials from any Medicaid program. We are waiting for the March audit case results. Then the final results for all months of audits combined. If we meet the states' mandated accuracy rate for each category; 96.8% accuracy rate for approvals and denials in addition to the 90% accuracy rate for technical errors.

#### **Family & Children Medicaid/Energy:**

**Intake unit** remains fully staffed with six caseworkers, one agency interpreter. Caseworkers' intake and process F&C Medicaid applications. Refresher training on the income policy was held this month as a result of error trends found during the REDA audits. Interpreter continues to assist the FNS review unit with interviews when not interpreting.

**Review unit** continues to face ongoing challenges with three frozen positions since 2024. Currently seven caseworkers struggle to handle caseloads of over 1400 each. In addition to monthly recertification's they respond to all changes reported or discovered on the many reports required to work monthly, they daily assist all ongoing recipients with questions, concerns or to report changes such as birth of child. A refresher training on F&C Medicaid manual section MA-3306 MAGI income was held. The staff have been working hard to meet timeliness deadlines and accuracy percentages.

#### **Adult Medicaid:**

**Intake unit** currently six caseworkers; one vacant position was frozen Feb. 2025. This unit continues to work diligently meeting application processing timeliness standard. They're responsible for intake and processing of Adult Medicaid applicants.

**Review unit** remains fully staffed with seven caseworkers. They have been adjusting to the changes made last month within the unit assigning one caseworker to handle all F&C referrals, walk-ins, return call and etc. So far there has been positive feedback from staff allowing them more time to work on monthly recertification, reported changes and reports.

#### **Long Term Care/Community Alternative Program/Special Assistance:**

**LTC/CAP/SA unit** continues to struggle with daily challenges as a result of two frozen vacant positions; one Feb. 2025; one 2024. Current unit of two is responsible for completion of all monthly recertification's, any change of circumstance for all three programs, for caseload of four IMC III's. Additionally, complete all intake and processing of these three programs. The complexity, focus to detail and extensive research required for transfer of assets during the established look back period can be very time demanding. If an agency error in eligibility is made it could be very costly to the agency/county. Unit supervisor tries to alleviate as much as possible however she supervises the NEMT staff too.

#### **Non-Emergency Transportation:**

**NEMT unit** has no vacancy; unit of two receive daily phone calls. Once transportation request is received these workers must verify the beneficiary is currently Medicaid eligible and meets all requirements including on Medicaid direct health plan. They complete billing for vendor transportation and mileage.

#### **Food & Nutrition Services:**

**Intake unit** has two frozen vacancies since 2024; currently a unit of six are responsible for handling all intake and processing FNS applications. Unit has been able to maintain the 95% or above timeliness requirement for processing FNS applications. Last month, a change was implemented in an attempt to alleviate some of the stress on the FNS review unit whom continues to be short staffed; this unit begun handling all late recertification's. FNS recertification is considered late if recertification form (DSS-2435) that was electronically generated and mailed to the household is received by the local agency after the last calendar day of the month following the end of the certification period. The staff member must complete phone interview, verify evidence necessary and determine eligibility. This assistance has helped some and the intake unit have adapted to the change with no issues.

**Review unit** continue to struggle with one frozen vacant position Feb. 2025, two frozen vacant positions 2024. One additional vacant position as of 4/3/2025 resignation. Current unit of five caseworkers tirelessly are trying to handle 6,173 cases. In addition, they're responsible for making changes and working reports timely. In NC, most FNS households are required to be recertified every six months to continue receiving benefits, with some exceptions for specific households. Exceptions include households with only specified individuals who are without earned income

are certified every twelve months. Unit lead carry's a caseload of 1029, supervisor in her position less than a year; continues to handle SNAP caseload. They try to be available to assist staff with questions, address client complaints or concerns, keep staff updated on policy changes.

#### **Child Support:**

**Establishment unit** currently have only two agents. There previously had been a decrease in child support applications due to the CCU wavier not requiring child support cooperation for Medicaid recipients; however effective July 1, 2025, this wavier ends. Medicaid applicants, change of circumstances and recertification's will resume child support referrals. This will result in an increase in child support applicants.

**Enforcement unit** of four with one frozen position 2024. All child support staff have been adjusting to the E-court system and have seen improvement daily. The judge has requested an increase on cases placed on the court docket moving forward. Child Support staff continue to experience issues at the court house with internet connection on court days. Establishment & Enforcement completed 101 orders this month.

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

**Marcee Swindell-Thompson, Program Manager**

#### **Vacancies/Updates/News for March 2025**

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

The CPS unit continues to face 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 interviewed and recommended a candidate; waiting for necessary paperwork before the position can be filled. We are utilizing Vanguard Services and have one contracted Social Worker. The afterhours continues to operate with only one after-hours worker. This position continues to complete 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 Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit to review agency data, policy updates, and casework.

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

The unit remains fully staffed with five SW. The Supervisors position is currently vacant, and maintained by the Program Manager who holds dual positions at this time. Currently I H S only have 15 open I H S cases at this time, which leaves the staff with a very manageable caseload. Due to the shortage of staffing in both Foster Care and in CPS, two SW's have been assigned to assist with CPS with initiating and working the investigations. We only have three Foster Care cases that remain in court at this time, but we are excited to see our caseload decreasing. The staff all participated and completed the four levels of FEMA training as required by the county for proficiency. Unit cohesiveness is our goal, and the flexibility and ability to work and assist others is something we will continue to achieve to improve the successful outcomes for this agency as a whole.

The Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit to review agency data, policy updates, and casework.

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

At this time, we currently have four frozen positions within the Foster Care Unit and three Foster Care Social Workers. We currently have 93 children in Foster Care being cared for by relatives or foster parents. We will continue to strive to protect and serve all the children in Foster Care while simultaneously working towards the ultimate goal of Permanency for all children in care.

The Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit to review agency data, policy updates, and casework.

#### **Transitional Unit:**

The Transitional Unit has one frozen 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 with hopes of starting a new MAPP class April 2025. The Regional Child Welfare Consultant (RCWC) conducted an onsite visit to review agency data, policy updates, and casework

**Adult Services:**

The Adult Services Unit continues to have one frozen position. The lead Investigator of the Adult Services Unit is on medical leave until March 14<sup>th</sup>, leaving the unit understaffed. This unit continues to serve ages 18 and above, with protective services, guardianship, and special assistance in-home case management as well as many inquiries/outreach situations and completing complaint investigations on Adult Care Homes.

Guardianship cases are on the rise. 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. Certain necessary application documentation can be mailed to individuals that wish to apply and when received back the worker can conduct telephone interviews to complete that application. 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. Workers are encouraged to make telephone contacts with clients at least every two weeks to offer support and resources to clients and to encourage program participation. The workers will continue helping the foster care unit with transporting and monitoring foster care visits. The agency continues to have monthly meetings with the state reps by conference calls.

**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 157 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. Day Care Unit will continue to be monitored by Supervisor to ensure workers are completing cases correctly and documenting appropriately.

**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.

**Monthly Administrative Update**  
**For March, 2025**  
**April 21<sup>st</sup> 2025 Meeting**

**DSS Audit**

Our agency completed the fiscal compliance audit for 2024-2025. I am pleased to inform you that we had No findings. I would to thank my Accounting Specialist, Ms. Rebecca Cance for an outstanding job.

**Social Worker Appreciation Month**

On March 20<sup>th</sup> we honored our Social Workers by hosting a catered luncheon for all their hard work and dedication for the work they do and families they serve.

**Regional Directors Meeting**

On March 26<sup>th</sup>, I attended the Region 6 Directors meeting in Wallace N.C. It was a great opportunity to meet the newest Directors in our region. We were able to share our experiences as well as our challenges as Directors.

**Community Services**

On March 27<sup>th</sup> we held a Medicaid Health Resource Event at our agency. It was a great opportunity to learn about Medicaid health plan benefits, and Medicaid expansion.

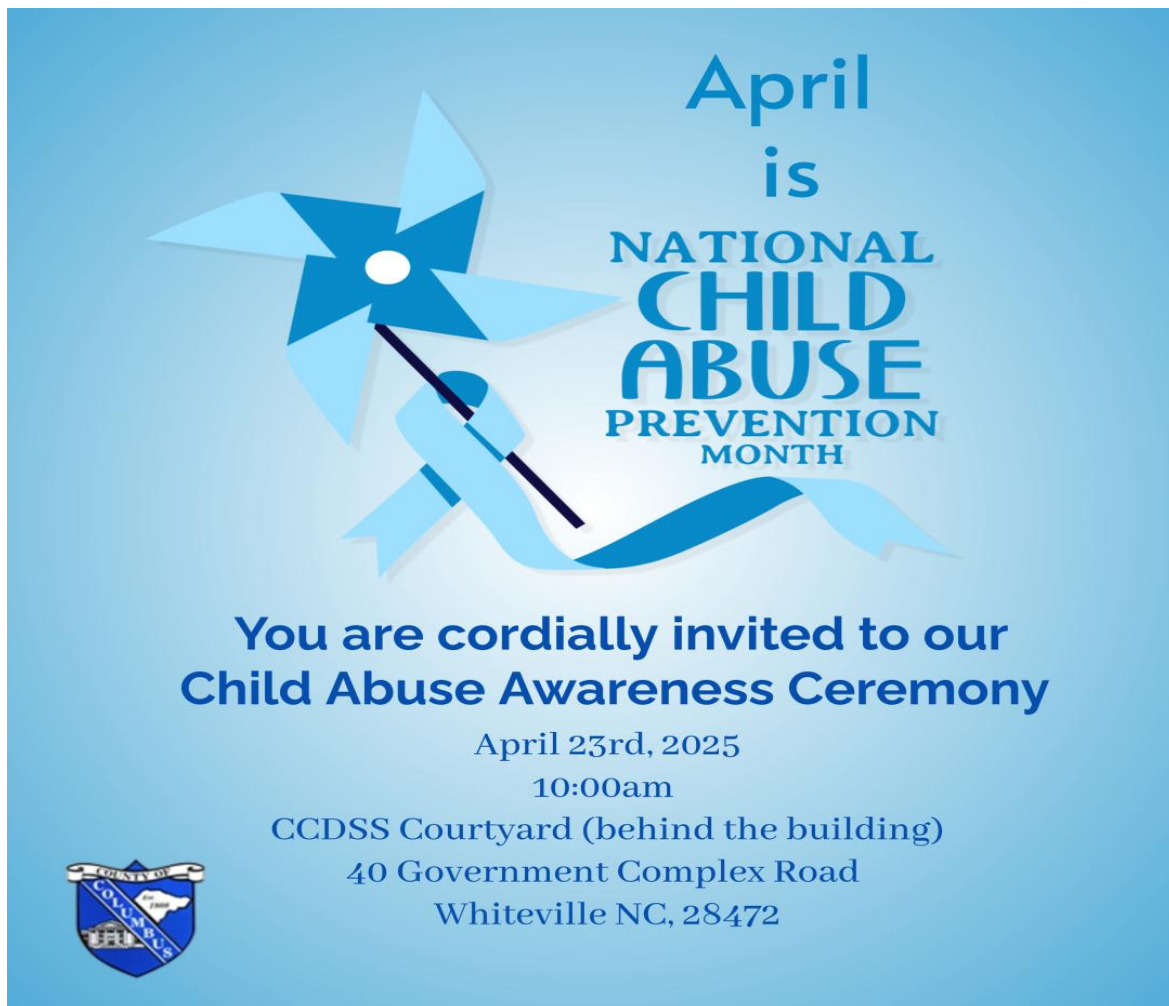
Our upcoming community event “DSS Unity in the Community” planning is underway. This event will be Saturday, June 21<sup>st</sup> in the DSS parking lot.

**March Collections**

Child Support \$453,146  
Program Integrity \$4,178.68

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





**March 2025**  
**Human Services**

**Adult Services (APS)**

APS Reports Accepted: 13  
County Wards: 27  
Number of Payee Cases: 4  
Adults Served APS: 0

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

Reports Accepted: 20  
Reports Screened out: 15  
Families Receiving In-Home Services: 11  
Children Served: 17  
Contacts with Families Monthly: 128  
Assessments: 15

**Foster Care**

Foster Children in Foster Homes: 89  
Children Placed Outside County: 36  
Agency Adoptions: 0  
Pending Adoptions: 0  
Total Foster Homes Licensed: 6  
Total Children in Foster Care: 89



**Work First Employment (TANF)**

Applications Taken: 14  
Applications Approved: 3  
Individuals Receiving Benefits: 146  
Entered Employments: 1  
Number in Non-Paid Work Experience: 0

**March 2025**  
**Human Services (continued)**

**Program Integrity**

Collections for Fraud: \$4,178.68  
New Referrals: 4  
Cases Established: 0

**Day Care**

Children Receiving Day Care Assistance: Not Available  
Children on the Waiting List: 183  
Amount Spent on Day Care Services: \$254,516.00

**March 2025Economic Services**

**Food & Nutrition**

Applications Taken: 271  
Applications Approved: 269  
Active Cases: 6,173  
Benefits Issued: \$2,052,424.00  
Participants Served: 12,032

**Adult Medicaid**

Applications Taken: 117  
Redeterminations: 208  
Applications Processed: 177  
Total Medicaid Cases: 15,114  
Total Individuals Receiving: 21,266

**Medicaid Transportation (NEMT)**

Number of Medicaid Transportation Trips: 1,220  
Amount Requested for Reimbursement: \$31,301.12

**Family & Children’s Medicaid**

Applications Taken: 208  
Applications Processed: 366  
Redeterminations: 612

**Child Support**

Absent Parents Located: 42  
Orders Enforced: 1,086  
Active Cases: 2,987  
Collections: \$453,146.00

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

Finance Director Heather Woody requested approval of the Mauldin & Jenkins Engagement Letter and Audit Contract for FY 2025 in the amount of \$145,000.

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

***\*A COPY OF THE ENGAGEMENT LETTER & FULL CONTRACT FOR FY/25 IS HOUSED IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE\*\****

Finance Director Heather Woody requested approval of the following Budget Amendments and Project Ordinance:

- Commissioner Byrd made a motion to approve A, B, C , seconded by Vice Chairman Smith . The motion unanimously passed.

<b>BUDGET AMENDMENT</b>				FY 24/25
<b>Name of Department:</b>		SHERIFF'S OFFICE		
<b>Agency Head Signature:</b>				
<b>Date Prepared:</b>	April 14, 2025	<b>Date Received in Finance:</b>		
Budget Code			EXPENDITURES	Requested
Fund	Dept.	Category	Classification	Increase or (Decrease)
010	4310	535100	MAINTENANCE & REPAIR - VEHICLES	\$2,185
			Total Net Expense	\$2,185
Budget Code			REVENUES	Requested
Fund	Dept.	Category	Classification	Increase or (Decrease)
010	3431	489000	MISCELLANEOUS REVENUE - SHERIFF	\$2,185
			Total Net Revenue	\$2,185
<b>Explanation of Increase or Decrease:</b>				
SEDGWICK CLAIMS MANAGEMENT SERVICES INSURANCE CHECK - 2022 FORD F150				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This budget revision has been reviewed by the Columbus County Finance Officer. <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-end;"> <span style="flex-grow: 1;">Signature: <i>Heather N. Woody</i></span> <span>Date: 4/14/2025</span> </div>				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This budget revision has been reviewed by the Columbus County Budget Manager/County Manager: <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-end;"> <span style="flex-grow: 1;">Signature: <i>[Signature]</i></span> <span>Date: 4/15/2025</span> </div>				
Notes:				
INCREASE MAINTENANCE & REPAIR - VEHICLES PER SHERIFF'S OFFICE REQUEST				
This budget revision has been approved by the Board of Columbus County Commissioners on:				

## FY 24/25

Date Prepared: April 14, 2025 Date Received in Finance :


Budget Code			EXPENDITURES	Requested
Fund	Dept	Category	Classification	Increase or (Decrease)
010	4310	550000	CAPITAL OUTLAY	\$123,982
010	4310	535100	MAINTENANCE & REPAIR - VEHICLES	\$18,000
010	4201	512107	SALARIES/WAGES - COLA	<b>(\$141,982)</b>
			Total Net Expense	<b>(\$0)</b>

3 NEW DODGE DURANGOS & UPFIT COST. PURCHASE APPROVED BY BOARD AT APRIL 7TH MEETING

Signature <i>E. Eads</i> Deputy County Mgr.		Date <i>4/15/25</i>
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USED BUDGETED COLA FOR THE COST OF THE VEHICLES IN A EFFORT TO NOT INCREASE THE OVERALL BUDGET.

Signature _____		Date _____
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Deacon Jones

Chrysler of Clinton



Formerly:

PERFORMANCE

CDJR

2025 Dodge Durango Pursuit

North Carolina Statewide Term Contract STC 2510A

Trucks All Types & Configurations

Contract Term Dates: February 1, 2024 - January 31, 2029

Columbus COSO - Durango Pursuit X3

Drivetrain Configurations

5.7L Hemi V-8	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	WDEE75-22Z	2025 Dodge Durango Pursuit, 5.7L Hemi V-8 AWD	\$ 43,306.87
3.6L V-6	<input type="checkbox"/>	WDEE75-2BZ	2025 Dodge Durango Pursuit, 3.6L V-6 AWD	\$ 40,438.68

NC2510A Base Configuration

Base Powertrain Configuration

WDEE75	5.7L Hemi V-8 MDS VVT Engine, 8 Speed Automatic Transmission, 22Z	Base
WDEE75	3.6L V-6 24 Valve VVT Engine, 8 Speed Automatic Transmission, 2BZ	Base

Base Interior Configuration

Vinyl	Vinyl Floor Covering	Base
Front	Cloth Front Seat Covering	Base
C5/X9	Cloth Rear Seat Covering	Base

Base Package / Options

Black Steel Wheels w/ Chrome Center Caps	8.4" Touchscreen Radio Display
255/60R18 BSW On/Off Road Tires	Blind Spot & Cross Path Detection
Power Windows, Door Locks, Mirrors	Class IV 2" Receiver Hitch
Parksense Rear View Camera	7/4 Way Trailer Light Wiring Connectors
130 MPH Limited Top Speed	Power 8 Way Driver seat
Full Size Spare Tire & Steel Wheel	2 Row Seating - No 3rd Row Seating Option
4 Key Fobs Standard	Secure Park - Secures Transmission w/o FOB

Option Availability and Compatibility Vary

USE THIS FORM AS A GUIDE

Please Return to your Performance Representative For Confirmation

Seat/Trim Options			MSRP	6% Disc
<input type="checkbox"/>	C5/X9	HD Cloth Bucket Front Seat / Cloth Rear Seat	STD	STD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A7/X9	HD Cloth Bucket Front Seat / Vinyl Rear Seat	\$ 160	\$ 150.40
Functional Packages			MSRP	6% Disc
<input type="checkbox"/>	ADG	Technology Group	\$ 2,910	\$ 2,735.40
<input type="checkbox"/>	ADL	Skid Plate Group	\$ 370	\$ 347.80
Wheel Options			MSRP	6% Disc
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CAPS	Black Steel Wheels with Chrome Center Caps	STD	STD
<input type="checkbox"/>	WP1	18"X8.0 Painted Aluminum Wheels	\$ 430	\$ 404.20



Interior Options		MSRP	6% Disc
<input type="checkbox"/>	CKD Carpet Floor Covering	\$ 160	\$ 150.40
<input type="checkbox"/>	CUF Full Length Floor Console	\$ 370	\$ 347.80
<input type="checkbox"/>	JRC Power Liftgate	\$ 480	\$ 451.20
<input type="checkbox"/>	UBN Uconnect 5 Navigation with 10.1" Display Screen	\$ 1,095	\$ 1,029.30
<input type="checkbox"/>	GXF Fleet Key Alike (Specify Frequency 1-4)	\$ 455	\$ 427.70
Spotlight Options		MSRP	6% Disc
<input type="checkbox"/>	LNF Black Driver Side LED Spotlight	\$ 750	\$ 705.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	LNA Matching Passenger Side LED Spotlight	\$ 750	\$ 705.00
Law Enforcement Options		MSRP	6% Disc
<input type="checkbox"/>	CUG Police Style Floor Console	\$ 1,195	\$ 1,123.30
<input type="checkbox"/>	CW7 Deactivate Rear Doors & Windows	\$ 145	\$ 136.30
<input type="checkbox"/>	LSA Security Alarm	\$ 190	\$ 178.60
<input type="checkbox"/>	MT8 Delete Rear Liftgate Badging	N/C	N/C
<input type="checkbox"/>	XDG Passenger Side Ballistic Door Panel	\$ 2,995	\$ 2,815.30
<input type="checkbox"/>	XDV Driver Side Ballistic Door Panel	\$ 2,995	\$ 2,815.30
<input type="checkbox"/>			\$ -
Additional Options			\$ -
<input type="checkbox"/>			\$ -
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tier 1 Tier 1 Color Upcharge ( \$370 Per Car)	\$ 395	\$ 370.00
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tier 2 Tier 2 Color Upcharge (\$564 Per Car)	\$ 600	\$ 564.00

Standard Colors:		Quantity
No Cost Colors		
<input type="checkbox"/>	PXJ DB Black Clear Coat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PW7 Bright White Clear Coat	
<input type="checkbox"/>		
Tier 1 - Additional \$370 Per Car		
<input type="checkbox"/>	PRV Octane Red Pearl Coat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PDN Destroyer Grey Clear Coat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PSE Triple Nickel (Silver)	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PHC Red Oxide	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCA Frostbite Pearl Coat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCQ Night Moves (Dark Blue)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PAS Vapor Grey Metallic Clear Coat	3.00
Tier 2 - Additional \$564 Per Car		
<input type="checkbox"/>	PBU Blu By You Pearl Coat	
<input type="checkbox"/>	P79 Michigan State Police Blue	

Dealer Added Items		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Stellantis Disc	Increased Government Concessions: 25MY until Order Closeout \$ (2,500.00)
<input type="checkbox"/>		
<input type="checkbox"/>		

Option Availability and Compatibility Vary USE THIS FORM AS A GUIDE Please Return to your Performance Representative For Confirmation	
<div> <div>Total Price Per Vehicle:</div> <div>\$ 41,327.27</div> </div> <div> <div>Number Units This Spec:</div> <div>3.00</div> </div> <div> <div>Total this Order:</div> <div>\$ 123,981.81</div> </div>	

COLUMBUS COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

Ordinance making appropriations to the Columbus County Airport – AWOS  
Installation Design and Bidding Grant Capital Project Fund

for the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2024

BE IT ORDAINED by the Board of Commissioners of Columbus County, North Carolina as follows:

**Section 1:** The following amounts are hereby made to the Columbus County Airport – AWOS Installation Design and Bidding Grant Capital Project pursuant to G.S. 159 -13.2 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024.

Source of Revenue			Budget
	51-3464-437000	LOCAL MATCH 36237.53.19.2	\$ 2,191.00
	51-3464-432001	2022 NPE FUNDING 36237.53.19.2	\$ 19,723.00
Total Estimated Revenues			<u>\$ 21,914.00</u>
Project Appropriations			
	51-4701-548012	ENGINEERING SERVICES 36237.53.19.2	\$ 21,914.00
Total Project Appropriations			<u>\$ 21,914.00</u>

**Description:** 2022 Non-Primary Entitlement (NPE) funded.

**Section 2:** The project undertaken pursuant to this ordinance is in accordance with the Recommended Budget and any changes made during the County Commissioners' budget work sessions.

**Section 3:** The Finance Director is hereby directed to maintain within the Capital Project Fund sufficient specific detailed accounting records to satisfy all applicable regulations. The terms of any financing agreement also shall be met.

**Section 4:** The County desires to expend its own funds for the purpose of paying certain costs of various projects, for which expenditures the County reasonably expects to reimburse itself from the proceeds of debt to be incurred by the County.

**Section 5:** All expenditures relating to obtaining any bond referendum and or installment purchase will be reimbursed from bond proceeds and installment purchase proceeds in accordance with the requirements of the United States Treasury Regulations Section 1.150 -2.

**Section 6:** This declaration of official intent is made pursuant to Section 1.150-2 of the Treasury Regulations to expressly declare the official intent of the County to reimburse itself from the proceeds of debt to be hereinafter incurred by the County for certain expenditures paid by the County on or after the date which is sixty (60) days prior to the date hereof.

**Section 7:** The County intends to seek Federal, State, and/or other grant funding to reduce the amount of loan proceeds. The adoption of this ordinance authorizes the County Manager and/or his representative to apply for and accept such funding if awarded.

**Section 8:** This project ordinance shall be entered in the minutes of the Board of Commissioners of Columbus County. Within five days hereof, copies of this ordinance shall be filed with the finance office in Columbus County, and with the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners of Columbus County. Copies of the Capital Project Ordinance shall be made available to the Budget Officer, the Project Manager, and the Finance Officer for direction in carrying out this project.

**Agenda Item #17: APPOINTMENTS/RE-APPOINTMENTS/REPLACEMENTS:**

Staff requested appointments, reappointments or replacements to the following board, 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
Opioid Settlement Committee	EB	Amy Sessions Healthcare Provider/Pharmacist	6/30/2027	1 <sup>ST</sup> – WATTS 2 <sup>ND</sup> - BYRD
Opioid Settlement Committee	EB	Erika Brown Boys and Girls Home	6/30/2027	1 <sup>ST</sup> – WATTS 2 <sup>ND</sup> - BYRD

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

**At 7:27 P.M.** A motion was made by Commissioner Watts and seconded by Commissioner Featherson to recess regular session and enter into Columbus County Water and Sewer Districts I, II, III, IV and V. The motion unanimously passed.

**Agenda Item #18: APPROVAL of WATER and SEWER DISTRICTS I, II, III, IV AND V COMBINATION MINUTES:**

a. April 07, 2025 Regular Session

## **MOTION:**

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

## **ADJOURN COMBINATION MEETING of Columbus County Water and Sewer Districts I, II, III, IV and V BOARD MEETING.**

## **MOTION:**

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

## **Agenda Item #19: COMMENTS:**

### **A. Board of Commissioners**

**Vice Chairman Smith** - Today, I was in Food Lion, and a lady said, 'I just want the board to know how individually proud I am of our courthouse.' It was so unexpected! She then added, 'It is beautiful, and I admire all of you for making it happen.'

**Commissioner Floyd** - I just hope everyone had a happy Easter!

**Commissioner Featherson** - No comments.

**Commissioner Byrd** - I heard last week that the sheriff's department went to one of our local schools, or county schools, and conducted a drug sweep, you could say, or went in to check. My point is, I was told, Mr. Creech, you might know, has he left, or is he still here? Anyway, I was told that in one class, every student except one had a vape. Is that right?

**Robert Creech** - There were a lot of them.

**Commissioner Byrd** - And my point is this: Miss Featherson, you can relate to this, years ago, Columbus County was built on small farms, small tobacco farms everywhere. These farms raised and educated a lot of children, and they learned one thing that we're missing now with our younger generation: work ethics. Back then, you had to get up and work in the tobacco fields, sucker topping, setting, walking behind, uncovering, resetting, you did all of those things. You'd get up in the morning, help empty a barn, run home, get dressed, and go to school. Do you know what that instilled in our generation, something that's missing now with our young people? We were raised to work and understand how it was done and how to respect it.

Now, our younger generation, all they do is walk around with a cell phone in their hand, or trip over things because they're too busy looking at that phone. Back in the day, Columbus County thrived with tobacco, with the money that came from it, the warehouses, and everything that benefited so many families. But when this county and our government got involved and started eliminating it, that's when the buyout came about. All that tax money that was put into the county came back. And with it, the work ethic that fueled our community.

Now, here we are with vape shops popping up everywhere, and we're not doing enough about it, other than what this board has tried to do in the last few months. We've tried to put some teeth into it, but it's destroying our young people. Not just in Columbus County, but in every county and every state where it exists. And the money isn't staying here, it's going back to India. If I remember correctly, one lady spoke about how the sales tax on vape products isn't the same as regular sales tax. Am I remembering that right?

**Commissioner Watts** - Yeah, that's what she said, it's less than the tax on food.

**Commissioner Byrd** - It was less than the tax on food, I thought. And the point is, are we just going to sit back and let Washington pass down all these things that are completely destroying the small rural communities? I don't know what we can do about it, but it really bothers me to pass by the vape shops and see the traffic going in and out. The money isn't staying here; it's going back to India or somewhere else. This is where law enforcement really needs to step up. I read in Wilmington that they raided some shops, and almost every one of them was selling products that are much more potent than what you can get on the street.

**Robert Creech** - We've done several joint ventures with other agencies, and what the general public needs to recognize is that vapes are not regulated. A nine-year-old or even a four-year-old can walk into a vape shop and buy a vape, it's not against the law. They are not regulated. They should be, I understand that, but at this point in time, they are not.

So what we need to do, what the public needs to do, is push for regulations on vapes, because right now, there are none. Rome County, for instance, is working on this. The last thing they did down there was try to get some regulations put in place. But as it stands, there are no regulations on vapes.

**Chairman Coleman** - Not only do those vapes contain small, or sometimes large amounts of illegal drugs, but they also contain formaldehyde and other harmful chemicals. People think vaping is a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes, but it's not. Anytime you inhale it, you risk developing what they call 'popcorn lung.

If you're inhaling formaldehyde from the time you're eight, ten, or twelve years old, it's incredibly dangerous. Until we can get some laws passed, we need to acknowledge what's happened. Honestly, we owe an apology to all the tobacco farmers for taking tobacco away from them and replacing it with vape products out on the street like we see today.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Mr. Chairman, the reason I bring this up is because a friend of mine came to talk to me. His child got addicted to something in one of these vapes, I can't remember the exact three or four letters that were in it, but whatever it was, it had him completely messed up. It was just like he was on a powerful street drug.

Anyway, Mr. Chairman, my point is this: I'd like to request that we send a letter to Representative Jones, Representative Britt, and Representative Rabon, and also to Congressman Rouzer, and maybe even reach out to the other counties and ask them to join us.

We need to ask every county and every representative to push for real regulations and give this issue some teeth. It's long overdue.

And with that, I'll rest.

**Commissioner Bullard** - So, you are asking for a letter?

**Commissioner Byrd** - Yes, I'm asking for a letter.

**Chairman Coleman** - Mr. Madden, can you do that for us?

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - Yes, sir.

**Commissioner Byrd** - Is there consensus? Does everybody agree?

**Chairman Coleman** - Does everyone agree?

**The Board of Commissioners** - Everyone agreed.

**Commissioner Bullard:** Wednesday night, I was at the Fireman's Association meeting in Chadbourn, and they brought up North Carolina House Bill 675. This bill would require all state-certified EMS providers to become nationally registered, which means everyone would have to pass a National Registry exam.

If EMS personnel don't pass the exam, they would not be allowed to continue functioning in their roles, which is especially concerning given that they're already short-handed. This includes Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), Advanced EMTs, Paramedics, Medical Responders, and EMS Instructors.

If passed, the bill would go into effect on January 1, 2026. Current EMS personnel would be required to obtain National Registry certification by January 1, 2030, to maintain their credentials.

The bill includes several other provisions that would critically impact the functioning of our EMS services going forward. The Association has asked me to bring this issue before the board and request a letter of support to send to our representatives and officials, urging them not to support House Bill 675.

Mr. Madden, do you have anything to add to that?

**County Manager Eddie Madden** -No, sir. I know there was some discussion about telecommunications possibly being included, but we think there might be an exception for them, right?

**Interim Emergency Services Director Kay Stephens** - Yes, but we need to ask for clarification on that as well, whether they also have to obtain a medical certification.

**Commissioner Bullard** - Ms. Kay was at that meeting and heard the request as well.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - We will work with her on that letter.

**Commissioner Watts** - I don't have much to say, but I do want to back up Commissioner Byrd on the issue of vapes. I have a child in third grade, and the other day he came home and said, 'Daddy, there's a kid in my class who has a vape.' We're talking about an eight-year-old, and it's a major problem. So, I do support Commissioner Bird on that issue.



As for tobacco, I'm still one of the five who are still working in tobacco, and those people you're talking about, they're more than welcome to come work. I've always said that before you graduate high school, you should have worked in tobacco at least one summer.

## **B. County Manager:**

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - I just want to reiterate what Commissioner Smith said about the courthouse, it looks very good. They were up there today finishing up some landscaping. If you've noticed, the gravel parking lot beside what used to be Juvenile Justice, between there and the funeral home, has now been paved and striped. It looks great.

We also have a ceremony coming up that I'll mention in just a few minutes. But if you get a chance, ride by and take a look, it's outstanding.

We opened bids last week on several water projects, and we will have those calendared for your May 5th agenda. Senior prom is this week, on April 24th. I know some of you look forward to that event each year; it's a great occasion, and we encourage each of you to go. If you plan to attend, please get with Ms. Jana, and she'll make sure she purchases a ticket for you.

We're also kicking off our second annual Young Professionals Network on April 30th. We've invited 12 Columbus employees to participate, and the event will take place in the afternoon. If you get a chance, please drop by for that kickoff meeting, we would certainly encourage you to attend.

Today, we received an invitation for the SEC graduation on May 16th at 9:00 a.m. Jana will send out a reminder about that as well. That's always a very good event to attend.

The proposed budget for FY26 will be presented on May 19th. Ms. Woody is working on that now, and we'll keep you updated. After it's presented formally, we'll sit down with you and schedule meetings to go through the budget document line by line, or in whatever format you prefer.

The memorial garden at the courthouse is complete, and we have a ribbon-cutting scheduled for May 30th at 11:00 a.m. This will also include the dedication of the Blue Star monument. It has turned out to be a very nice park at the courthouse.

There are several upcoming festivals and events. I want to highlight the Strawberry Encounters dinner on May 2nd, which is right around the corner. I know tickets have to be purchased for that, so if you plan to attend, please let Jana know as soon as possible. Also, on April 28th, there is an intergovernmental meeting in Tabor City at the Ritz. Several of you typically attend those meetings, so please mark your calendars for April 28th.

Let me address some of the concerns raised this evening regarding tax collection fees. The board is well aware that we've been collecting taxes on behalf of municipalities for the past 15 years at a flat rate. You all asked us to look at this, and our staff did an in-depth comparison, gathering data not only from our in-county municipalities but also from other counties regarding their collection fees.

We wanted to ensure we were in line with others. Our staff presented you with options 1%, 2%, 3%, and ultimately, the board landed on 4%. We've been collecting \$32,000 to perform this task on behalf of every municipality. This includes postage, public notices for delinquent taxes, second notices, and whatever collection process ensues. This is a losing proposition for us.

In that report presented to you in January, we estimated our expense for performing this task at just under \$150,000. The board opted for the 4% rate in January, which would generate a little over \$222,000. Our tax office provided notice to the municipalities of this change. Mr. Currie pointed out that he reached out and had concerns about this rate and mentioned prior agreements.

We did some research, and our clerk went through the minute books to find any prior agreements in place. We found a few agreements, including one for the City of Whiteville and one for Chadbourn, but we did not find a blanket agreement covering all municipalities. This prompted the resolution before you tonight.

We had to go back to the drawing board and send notice by resolution, in accordance with the agreement, to every municipality. Any old agreements that were in place, if the board approves the resolution, will be terminated, and we will start fresh with a new system.

The board approved the 4% rate in January, but we understand that some municipalities may have concerns. We are open to discussing a gradual increase over time, and we have ample time to meet with them and work toward an amicable outcome.

I know many municipalities are likely far along in their budget process, so I understand why there may be concerns. But I want to assure you that we notified them in January, invited them to this meeting, and communicated the changes. Mr. Currie and I have been in touch about the old agreements, and it has been about three to four months since this discussion started.



This is not a big surprise; it's something this board has been talking about for a while. We're more than willing to sit down and work out something on your behalf. I just want to provide some history here. There's been ample time for notice, and we've communicated formally through resolution and informally by notifying the municipalities of what will be considered tonight. So, please know that we've been communicating.

**Commissioner Byrd** - I certainly can't comprehend the figures he mentioned, saying it would go up 942%. I don't know where he was getting those numbers from.

But, for instance, take Walmart. I understand that 4% on something like \$75,000 is significant, and that's why I suggested we consider putting a cap in place.

Also, you're likely not going to have to send out more than one notice, more than likely, it will come without the need for multiple notices.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - I understand that. But I also want you to understand, they just built that new building. And specifically, in the case of the City of Whiteville, we've been charging them \$11,421 to perform all the services I previously described.

This issue was raised in your audit report. The auditor expressed concern, particularly about the 2% discount. It's something this board also identified as a concern, which is why we conducted the research and presented the findings to you in an open session.

We've been discussing this for over three months now, so this should come as no surprise.

**Commissioner Bullard** - I still support them paying what it actually costs to perform this service.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - Well, if you base it on that, Mr. Bullard, we're talking about at least a 3% fee. Now, I understand, and I want to reiterate, that our staff, namely Melanie Hester, who put together this matrix for us, did the research and contacted other counties and municipalities. A 3% fee is pretty common.

As for 4%, I don't recall us finding any other county charging that much, but that is within the board's prerogative.

We want you to know this wasn't done haphazardly. It was the result of extensive research and benchmarking with other counties to ensure we were in line.

**Commissioner Byrd** -We can't just break even, because the slightest issue could lead to a loss. For example, if it's only \$11,000, a municipality couldn't even hire someone for three months, especially when you factor in benefits and everything else that comes with that cost.

So, yes, we need to work together, but the county cannot continue to absorb this loss every year.

Now, regarding the point he made about the 2%, we've been absorbing that as well, but as Mr. Curry mentioned....

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - I'm not following that rationale. All I know is, if the City of Whiteville or a neighboring city...

**Commissioner Byrd** -No, I was talking about what he said, was he saying that we did, or did not, hold back the 2% from them?

**County Manager Eddie Madden** -I didn't pick up on that.

*Finance Director Heather Woody responded regarding a previous glitch that was in the Tax Office's software system which resulted in displaying incorrect information during last tax season, that issue is currently being resolved.*

**Commissioner Byrd** - He said something about an error in the tax office.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - He mentioned an error, he said we budgeted \$900,000 in one year, but only brought in a little over \$300,000. That's a significant difference.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - the actual number is around \$300,000. Anyway, we'll sit down with them and work something out, but I want you to know that this is not something we've just put in your lap without any preparation beforehand.

**Commissioner Bullard** -But we do not want to lose money this year from collecting their taxes.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - Understood.

**Commissioner Bullard** - We cannot afford to lose money.

**Commissioner Featherson** -That \$11,000 figure, is that what the City of Whiteville pays? Is that what they've been paying? They're the largest, right?

**County Manager Eddie Madden** -Yes, ma'am. The second would be Tabor City; they've been paying roughly \$6,000. Chadbourn, around \$4,000. So, not much in the way of offsetting our cost.

**Commissioner Byrd** -What about Lake Waccamaw, Bolton, and Sandyfield?

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - Bolton \$1080.

**Commissioner Byrd** - They're pleased. I spoke with them today, and they were pleased with the 4%. You know, they say they can't collect it for that.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - No, sir.

**Commissioner Byrd** -And then they also told me about the contract they had for the 8%. Now the man from Tabor City said 9% for back taxes.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - I think our staff would say we want to help them, we want to perform this task on their behalf because they're really not set up to do it, but we can't lose money in the process.

**Chairman Coleman** - We've got to work together.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - The Wall that Heals comes through tomorrow.

**Logistics Captain Robert Creech** - They will leave the Brunswick County line at 12:30 p.m. and travel through the middle of downtown Whiteville.

**County Manger Eddie Madden** - It will be here from April 24th through April 27th.

**Chairman Coleman commented before the meeting ended that** I encourage everyone to participate and help with the wall, and to celebrate it. It will be at the VFW location on Route 701 for about a week. I highly recommend going there to see it, it's truly something to behold.

Mr. Madden, I had some people ask if we could speak with the state DMV office about either increasing their staff or extending their hours, specifically here in Whiteville.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - I think I have an explanation for that. I mentioned that I know firsthand the DMV office in Bladen County closed. As a result, some of the staff transferred over here, but all the customers who had historically gone to the Bladen location have had to come here instead. The local Merritt family, who has been operating this office, won the bid for the Bladen County site. They are about to reopen it, and I believe that will help mitigate these long wait times.

**Chairman Coleman** - I believe the driver's license office on Chadbourn Highway...

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - yes, sir.

**Chairman Coleman** - People are saying they have to wait three to four hours at a time.

**Commissioner Watts** - They prolonged their hours, didn't they?

**Logistics Captain Robert Creech** - They have extended their hours from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

**County Manager Eddie Madden** - This should help, and making an appointment online should also help speed up the process.

**Chairman Coleman** - I do want to thank the staff for all that you do. I know that our managers and assistant managers work for the county and ultimately answer to us as commissioners. I appreciate you coming to us, advising us, and keeping us informed. I think it's important for the public to understand that the commissioners are ultimately the ones responsible for making decisions. I'm grateful for the guidance you provide, not just you, but also the two assistants and other managers throughout Columbus County. I truly appreciate what you all do to support us and keep us on track.

Again, you know the Wall is coming, so let's support it. Support our local businesses as much as you can. Your tax dollars help, and they make a difference.

**Agenda Item #20: ADJOURNMENT:**

At 7:55 P.M., Commissioner Watts made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Commissioner Bullard. The motion unanimously passed.

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JANA NEALEY, Clerk to the Board

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LAVERN COLEMAN, Chairman