

**Minutes
Catawba County Board of Commissioners
Special Session
Thursday, May 29, 2008, 7:00 p.m.**

Budget

Budget Public Hearing and Wrap Up 113 05/29/08

Emergency Services

Sherrills Ford Fire District 114 05/29/08
Land transfer to State for 800 Mhz Tower 115 05/29/08

The Catawba County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session on Thursday, May 29, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the 1924 Courthouse, Robert E. Hibbitts Meeting Room, 30 North College Avenue, Newton, North Carolina. The purpose of the special meeting was for a budget hearing for public comment on the proposed County budget for Fiscal Year 2008/09.

Present were Chair Katherine W. Barnes, Vice-Chairman Lynn M. Lail, Commissioners Dan Hunsucker, Glenn E. Barger and Barbara G. Beatty.

Absent: None

A quorum was present.

Also present were County Manager J. Thomas Lundy, Budget Manager Judy V. Ikerd and County Clerk Barbara E. Morris.

1. Chair Barnes called the special meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
2. Chair Barnes stated the Board was present to take input on the budget proposal the County Manager had put before the Board and noted there had been adjustments made based on the discussions with County Departments at the meeting of May 28, 2008. Chair Barnes then opened the public hearing, noting it was the time and placed advertised for the hearing, and asked anyone wishing to speak to come forward. No one came forward to speak for or against the proposed budget and Chair Barnes closed the public hearing.
3. Upon the request of Chair Barnes, County Manager J. Thomas Lundy summarized items that had been added or revised in the proposed budget.
 - Catawba County Schools – a \$3.2 million project for the expansion at Murray Elementary – the design had started – County Schools Board has invoices for approximately \$175,000 in design fees and the Board has agreed to advance that \$175,000 so that bill could be paid before July 1. The Budget would be reduced on July 1 by \$175,000.
 - At the Board's last meeting at St. Stephens Elementary, the Board took action to let the Hickory School System get started on redoing the gym floor at Viewmont – that was already in the Budget, so since it was already funded, there would be a reduction in the Budget of \$63,165.
 - The Sheriff advised the Board that that department had submitted and had been awarded a Governor's Crime Commission Grant to fund a domestic violence unit in the County. Two individuals, a deputy and an investigator, for two years would be assigned to this unit. There is an \$84,000 grant for next year and 25% match of County funds and the County is also required to take care of the equipment costs not covered by the grant. The County would be receiving \$84,000 in revenue from the Crime Commission and allocating approximately \$55,000 in local match and equipment costs.
 - The Sheriff also indicated he had an individual who has been paid by the County School System doing a Criminal Justice Academy at Bandys and Maiden High Schools and it's been an 80% position working during the year (off in the summer). The person who has been doing that is retiring and at the same time there are additional courts being held in Newton (new district court with new judge assignment) – so there is a need for additional court time. The Sheriff wants to take part-time money already in the Budget to pay deputies to come in and work and convert that money to the other 20% so he can hire a full time person who will work 80% of the time at Bandys and Maiden High School and the other 20% would be the part time money – so

resulting in really no change in the budget.

- There was a lot of discussion about the fire service in the Sherrills Ford area. The Denver Fire Department announced that they would be ceasing service on June 30 for Catawba County. The Sherrills Ford Fire Department will assume that responsibility at their existing tax rate and will be able to provide better service resulting in improved insurance rating in the area. This would be at the 5 cent rate rather than the 8.92 cent rate Denver indicated they needed to provide the service. The Board's action would be to reduce the amount of money that was in the Budget for the Denver Fire Department and transfer it to the Sherrills Ford Fire Department to begin that service July 1.

- On the previous day, the Board took action to transfer approximately \$2.5 million which was in the Budget. This was money that has been collected over the years in the wireline/wireless funds authorized by the State and the General Assembly took action this year and will now close out those separate funds and that money is to roll to the County's General Fund before June 30. The Board took action to transfer those funds to the General Fund and allocate it for a series of projects – the expansion at the Justice Center, which will be started this next year as well as some other emergency projects. Since that action was taken by the Board, the Budget will need to be reduced by that \$2.5 million.

- The Board had already acknowledged that the State had imposed a \$2 tipping fee per ton tax on all Counties and all residents which was to go into effect July 1, coupled with the first increase in the past 14 years in local fees of \$1 fee. Barry Edwards, Utilities and Engineering Director, reported that a bill had been introduced in the General Assembly which would postpone that \$2 State tax until January 1 and the Board decided that the Budget Ordinance acknowledge that the State tax would not be levied until it came into effect, and the local would follow that effective date.

- These changes would result in about a \$2.6 million reduction in the budget bringing the revised budget to just over \$219 million.

Chair Barnes asked if there were any questions from the Board regarding these revisions. She noted the Board did not take action at this meeting on the Budget ordinance but would adopt these changes only. Commissioner Barger asked if the Denver Fire Department would be notified of the change adopted – Mr. Lundy said that correspondence would be sent after the official action taken by the Board.

Chair Barnes noted the current budget was within the current property tax rate. She stated that she was pleased there was a bill with the legislature regarding increasing the homestead exclusion and was looking forward to the upcoming legislative day in Raleigh to thank the delegation for its work.

Chair Barnes asked for a motion to adopt the items outlined by Mr. Lundy. Commissioner Dan Hunsucker made this motion and it carried unanimously.

4. Chair Barnes stated that she, Commissioner Beatty and Emergency Services Director David Weldon were in Sherrills Ford for a community meeting and asked Mr. Weldon to come forward to present an item. Mr. Weldon presented a request to realign the fire district for Sherrills Ford. After a request by the Denver Fire Station to increase the fire tax rate from 5 cents to .892 cents, it was determined that Sherrills Ford Fire Department could better handle the majority of the district previously handled by Denver. When the realignment was proposed to Denver Fire Department and the .892 cents rate was not approved, Denver Fire Department informed the County they would no longer provide services for the Sherrills Ford area. The Sherrills Ford Fire Department confirmed they would handle the service for this area, improve response times and actually improve the insurance fire rating for this area. Pursuant to the General Statutes, the Board of Commissioners may change and create fire district boundaries. Commissioner Barbara Beatty made a motion to change the fire district boundaries effective July 1, 2008 as requested and depicted on the map provided to the Board and that any fund balance left in the Denver Fire District Fund on July 1, 2008 be transferred to Sherrills Ford Fire Department. (County Manager Lundy clarified that the funds in this account were paid by Catawba County taxpayers and should be retained in Catawba County). The motion carried unanimously.
5. David Weldon, Emergency Services Director, presented a request regarding a 800 Mhz tower site which is in collaboration with the NC Highway Patrol and authorize Chair Barnes and Vice-Chair Lail to sign the contract transferring the land on which the tower will be erected to the State of North Carolina. Catawba County has made attempts to transfer this land to the State but there have been multiple delays on the part of the State. Mr. Lundy explained the land was part of River Bend Park which the County had originally given the Catawba County Board of Education for an elementary school and a portion was then deeded back to the County to erect the tower. The County had pushed the State to get the transfer of this land to the State completed

because a grant for the project was expiring but the State had failed to complete the transfer. The State agreed to have the transfer completed the day following this meeting and the action requested by staff was to have Chair Barnes or Vice-Chair Lail authorized to sign the contracts regarding this transfer. Commissioner Barger asked the size of the land – and staff indicated they would get the total acreage amount and relay it to the Board as well as if the County had the deed from the School Board to the County. Mr. Lundy clarified that the School Board was aware of the proximity of the tower and it was not opposed to the tower. Commissioner Beatty made a motion to authorize the Chair or Vice-Chair to sign the applicable contracts, contingent upon the confirmation that this portion of land was deeded to the County by the Catawba County School Board. The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Beatty was excused from the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

Mr. Lundy said the Board had raised a question regarding response times for the Sheriff's Department for properties located outside the city but the responder had to go through the city. Sheriff Huffman informed the Board that the response time for Catawba County was better than any of the surrounding Counties.

6. Chair Barnes adjourned the meeting adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Katherine W. Barnes, Chair
Board of Commissioners

Barbara E. Morris
County Clerk