

Minutes
Catawba County Board of Commissioners
Special Session, Tuesday, February 4, 2005, 1:00 p.m.

Meetings

Legislative Issues

02/04/05

The Catawba County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Friday, February 4, 2005, at 1:00 p.m. in the 2nd Floor Conference Room of the Government Center, Newton, North Carolina. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss general legislative issues with Margaret Klutz, State Director for Senator Elizabeth Dole.

Present were Chair Katherine W. Barnes, Commissioners Glenn E. Barger, Lynn Lail and Barbara G. Beatty.

Absent: Vice-Chair Dan Hunsucker, who was attending a meeting in Raleigh, NC.

A quorum was present. No action was taken.

Also present Graham R. Fields, Western Regional Representative for Senator Dole, Public Information Officer Dave Hardin, County Clerk Barbara E. Morris and a member of the press.

At 1:15 p.m. Chair Barnes welcomed Margaret Klutz and Graham Fields and expressed the Board's appreciation for their attendance at this meeting and asked to discuss the items the Board had slated for the upcoming Federal Legislative Agenda. Ms. Klutz said it was smart to address these items at this time with the various deadlines coming up fast approaching. Chair Barnes provided both Ms. Klutz and Mr. Fields with a list of the Board's priority items for this agenda.

Commissioner Lail discussed the County's proposed Public Health Dental Clinic which would provide access to dental care for approximately 13,000 children who currently do not have dental care. The Public Health Dental Practice currently serves 2000 children. With the formation of this Dental Clinic it is hoped that in addition to the 13, 000 children in Catawba County who will be served, additional children regionally will benefit. The County's Public Health Department has established relationships with UNC Chapel Hill Dental School and they have assisted in the planning and already send their dental students to Catawba County to work in the present dental clinic and are very interested in this project. Commissioner Lail said the County wants to request funding for this project and Ms. Klutz asked if there was a specific part of the project for which they were requesting these funds and Commissioner Lail indicated the focus was for the bricks and mortar for the facility. The County has been contact with dental vendors and they will assist with the equipment. Commissioner Lail also said there would be a capital campaign in this area to raise some of the necessary funds and the County has committed money to this project. Ms. Klutz said she will send a checklist to the Commissioners to ensure certain information is included with an appropriation request. Ms. Klutz said the County's position will be strengthened by all the cooperation and participation they have already received in this project and the County should clearly define the dental crisis and all the effort is being made in this area to solve this crisis. Commissioner Lail noted this type of project has not been done in the State and believes it should be a model for this type of service.

Chair Barnes next discussed the non-attainment rating the County had received regarding PM2.5. She said the County is very concerned about this designation as it adds a tremendous burden to the County in its current economic condition since this rating will deter businesses from coming to the County. The EPA has not given the County answers on abatement strategies. Ms. Klutz said this is a problem that Senator Dole is very concerned about and is very aware of the situation. Mr. Fields said they will continue to work with the County to remedy this situation. Chair Barnes said the County is willing to be a pilot study. Chair Barnes further said the County's concerns are not limited to economic matters as a result of this issue but also health concerns. The County has always been aware of air quality issues and have dealt with the ozone issue promptly. Ms. Klutz asked what the County was working on currently in this area and Chair Barnes said while the County doesn't know of any options, it has the Clean Smokestack Act and Duke Power is working on the new scrubber and that should reduce particulate matter by 75% but it is only 1/3 of the way completed.

Mr. Fields questioned the location of the monitor and Chair Barnes said we had a second monitor but that data is not yet accepted by EPA because they require a full year's data – and the readings on that monitor are not that much different from the monitor on HWY 321. Chair Barnes said the County is frustrated with the lack of help from the EPA to resolve this problem. Commissioner Lail said our local college, Lenoir Rhyne College, has just received a 3 million dollar contribution for an environmental institute and they will be able to help in this area in the future.

The County has not yet made a determination yet if they will appeal the designation.

Commissioner Barbara Beatty next discussed the HWY 321 bridge. The Unifour Metropolitan Planning Organization has identified this as a priority project as well as Caldwell and Catawba Counties to obtain funding to get this bridge replaced. Ms. Klutz asked if this project was on the TIP and Chair Barnes said she thought it was and the County had received a million dollars for planning/preliminary studies. The issues are the age and capacity of the bridge. Mr. Fields noted that this would benefit both Caldwell and Catawba Counties and it is a commerce issue since this affects tourism as it is a route to Boone and Blowing Rock. Ms. Klutz said if all the affected area (Caldwell, Catawba, Blow Rock, Boone (Watauga)) place this as a top priority, then that will make an impact and the united front will be helpful to get on the State TIP, which is the most important step.

Commissioner Glenn Barger discussed funding for a Public Safety Training and Education Complex. This would accomplish the needed training for firefighter and emergency services. The community college would like to put in a two year program for fire safety and emergency services safety – there is no program like this currently in the State. Another benefit is that there is a recertification requirement for fire fighters and there are no facilities to obtain this recertification on the East Coast and this type of training also impacts individual homeowners insurance rates when the firefighters have this type of training. It would also have economic impact on the County in the number of students who would be coming to the area for this training as well as the savings realized by homeowners in insurance premiums. This was presented to Senator Dole for funding opportunities last year and none was found. Ms. Klutz said earmarks are very hard to get – but suggested researching possible grants for this project. Mr. Field said he had talked with Dr. Dunbar at CVCC on this project and suggested looking at this at a lot of different approaches – economic, homeland security, education – to identify grants. Ms. Klutz said it didn't seem North Carolina had been given its fair piece of the pie – but they are attempting to get a better share of the funds available.

Ms. Klutz said that the County had a good record of public, private, non-profit partnership and it gives the County credibility when it asks for funds.

Chair Barnes said she would talk about the sludge facility since Vice-Chair Hunsucker was not present. Chair Barnes said the County would be looking for grants to have alternatives – and would like to move the facility from the current location (near a business park) – to near the landfill. Ms. Klutz suggested working with another community on what kind of grants have been awarded for this type of thing.

Commissioner Beatty addressed the FERC relicensing issue. Ms. Klutz asked what the major issues are for Catawba County and Commissioner Beatty said these were access to the lake, lake levels, aquatics and parrot feather, fish, quality of water but there are studies still outstanding on these issues. Ms. Klutz said Mr. Field was the person to keep in contact with on the FERC relicensing and he would be happy to talk with the Commissioners on this and Scott in the DC office is up to date on this issue. Commissioner Beatty invited Mr. Field to some of the relicensing meetings and said the tours would be advantageous.

Chair Barnes again thanked Ms. Klutz and Mr. Fields for coming to the County and Ms. Klutz said they were delighted to be invited. Commissioner Beatty asked if there would be money available for Counties that were designated non-attainment in the PM2.5 area. Chair Barnes said the frustration is the lack of information on how this occurs and no direction on where to go and no assistance being offered by the EPA. Ms. Klutz said their office is very concerned about this. Chair Barnes noted the EPA website says the 15.4 reading (Catawba County's reading) is good.

Chair Barnes offered any assistance the County could give Senator Dole's office and Ms. Klutz said the best help is to keep them informed and that in return helps them keep the County informed. She said the County should not hesitate to reach out to any of their representatives.

Ms. Klutz asked what the County's priority issue was and it was agreed that the non-attainment issue is the #1 priority. Chair Barnes also noted that our higher ed center DOE grant is ending and it cannot be renewed. It helps adults get 4 year degrees and it is very much a regional project. Commissioner Barger said it has had a tremendous impact on the County – 55% of the students are from outside the County. Ms. Klutz clarified that the federal grant is running out and Commissioner Barger asked that Senator Dole's office be on the lookout for other funding. Ms. Klutz asked if anyone had look at a renewal and Chair Barnes said this wasn't possible. Ms. Klutz said they would look at the Department of Education and Mr. Fields said he would continue working on finding funding. Ms. Klutz said tracking the graduates would be important information. Ms. Klutz noted the can-do attitude of this area.

Ms. Klutz asked if the County had worked with the USDA regarding the sludge facility and Chair Barnes said they were pursuing this.

The meeting adjourned at 2:14 p.m.

Katherine W. Barnes, Chair
Board of Commissioners

Barbara E. Morris, County Clerk