

**MINUTES
CHATHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION
OCTOBER 03, 2013**

The Board of Commissioners (“the Board”) of the County of Chatham, North Carolina, met in the Siler City Town Hall Courtroom, 311 North Second Avenue, Siler City, North Carolina, 6:30 PM on October 03, 2013.

Present: Chairman Walter Petty, Vice Chair Brian Bock,
Commissioners Mike Cross, Sally Kost and Pamela Stewart

Present: Mayor Pro Tem, John Grimes; Commissioners Tony Siler,
Larry Cheek, Michael Constantino, Cindy Bray, and
Thomas K. (Chip) Price III

Staff Present: Charlie Horne, County Manager; Renee Paschal, Assistant
County Manager; Vicki McConnell, Finance Officer; Sandra
B. Sublett, Clerk to the Board; and Lindsay Ray, Deputy
Clerk to the Board

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem John Grimes welcomed those in attendance and called the meeting to order 6:31 PM. Mayor Grimes then recessed the meeting so that the Chatham County Board of Commissioners could go into Closed Session.

CHATHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' ACTION

13-0530 Closed Session for the purpose of discussing personnel

REGULAR SESSION

Mayor Grimes called the meeting back to order at 6:41 PM.

JOINT BOARD MEETING

13-0526 Discussion of Chatham Randolph Mega-site

Mayor Grimes turned the meeting over to Siler City Town Manager, Bryan Thompson, to discuss the Chatham Randolph Mega-site.

Mr. Thompson stated the joint meeting would be a good forum to discuss any questions or issues to make sure everyone was the same page.

County Commissioner Brian Bock asked if there were any questions from the meeting recently held at the Siler City Senior Center.

Dianne Reid, Chatham County Economic Development Corporation President, reviewed the next steps for certification from the NC Dept. of Commerce. She stated engineering studies have to be completed and a letter of support from Randolph County is needed which they expect to receive at the October 7, 2013 Randolph County Board of Commissioners' Meeting.

Mr. Thompson stated they are trying to capture as much value as they can with the infrastructure they already have and do not want to duplicate what is already there. He said they are trying to maximize what is already in the ground and capitalize on the surrounding area.

Commissioner Kost asked if there were any cost estimates for water and sewer. Mr. Thompson stated there were rough estimates. Ms. Reid stated the engineering estimates are pretty solid.

Commissioner Kost asked if they could share the numbers. Mr. Thompson stated the engineering would be around half a million dollars. Mayor Grimes stated there will have to be pump stations. To get to the free fall is going to be a considerable distance, and the cost will be substantial.

Commissioner Kost asked if there any federal or state programs that have grants or loans or other sources of money. Mr. Thompson stated they are exploring resources for the planning side, leaving no stone unturned. Ms. Reid stated that in general for the construction that would be forthcoming if there were a new project.

Mr. Thompson stated the difference is they do not have any user identified. Mr. Hughes stated to be certified, you don't need to have a user identified. You don't need the infrastructure in the ground to be certified. Ms. Reid stated there are additional costs to be identified upwards of one million dollars.

Commissioner Price stated a plan must be in place but asked if it isn't part of that plan for that site to be approved? He stated we have engineering, but we also have to have funding lined up first. Ms. Reid stated that the funding does not have to be in place, but you do have to have the site ready to go in one year. County Commissioner Bock asked what was needed to get the study started.

Commissioner Petty asked about the Chatham County Board of Commissioners approving the money from the sale of the Siler City Business Park at their August 19, 2013 meeting Board of Commissioners' meeting. The County Manager stated the sale has not closed. He said that they are still dealing with NCDOT, but are close.

Public Works Director, David Hughes, stated the problem is with the surveying. Hobbs Upchurch and Associates walked off the job. Surveying is 95% of the job. The County is getting estimates from surveyors now. Mr. Hughes stated they may have to start the surveying over.

Commissioner Kost asked why the County couldn't just loan the money to itself. Commissioner Bock agreed.

Commissioner Kost also stated she wanted to see the money done as some sort of loan. She continued by stating this is going to make the owners' property a lot more valuable. She suggested that they have it as a revolving loan and make it available for future projects.

Commissioner Petty stated the Board did talk about doing that. Ms. Reid stated the EDC did create a proposal at their retreat to bring to the Board of Commissioners. The County Manager stated that would be a work session item at the next Board of Commissioners' meeting. Commissioner Bock asked if the Board could give the Town some assurance of that tonight.

Commissioner Cross made the motion to loan up to 1.28 million dollars from the sale of the Siler City Business Park to the County to give to the Town of Siler City. Commissioner Bock seconded. The motion carried five (5) to zero (0).

Commissioner Petty stated the Town and the County will create a special committee with staff to work with the engineers. The County Manager stated he would like Mr. Hughes to be a part of the process and would like to have the County and Town to both furnish personnel to oversee the committee. The County Manager asked about infrastructure and stated that broadband becomes critical at this point before industry. Commissioner Petty stated if you identify potential customers in that area you probably will have high speed internet.

Mayor Grimes asked Mrs. Reid about Duke Energy's analysis. Ms. Reid said it has been completed. Commissioner Petty asked if there were any other updates. Ms. Reid said there has been additional work on a potential alignment on an interchange on Highway #421. The NCDOT is still working on it. Commissioner Petty asked if the owners still have a couple of options. Ms. Reid said that is correct.

Commissioner Kost asked if Highway 421 is still being looked at as an interstate. Ms. Reid stated they probably need to look at presenting that again. It wasn't real promising when they first approached it largely because of the distance, and that was about a year and a half ago. They need to designate a connector and one of the keys is to tie in the military to Greensboro. It is worth going back to them.

Mayor Grimes asked if there were any more comments.

Commissioner Larry Cheek asked if both boards could be updated on the project regularly. Commissioner Petty agreed and asked how this could happen. Commissioner Cross stated that the special committee and both managers should be able to get the information to both boards as needed.

County Commissioner Walter Petty stated that the take away from this conversation is to get moving on the engineering. By consensus, everyone agreed.

13-0528 Discussion Regarding Hospital Sign

The County Manager stated a meeting would be held next Thursday to solidify the specifics of the deal.

Commissioner Siler stated it is a shame people come in from out-of-town, and they can't find the hospital because there isn't a sign that is visible from the main road.

Commissioner Price stated that he had heard different kinds of scenarios for why there had not been a sign, and he asked if it was because land was not available.

The County Manager stated the owners had not been willing to talk about giving the County a portion of that land until recently.

Commissioner Kost asked if the sign was for the community college in addition to the hospital.

Commissioner Petty stated the sign was for the hospital, the community college, and for the business park.

Commissioner Price stated he was glad to hear there was movement on the sign because there has been frustration about it for some time.

Commissioner Petty stated that they just couldn't reach the owner because he was out-of-the country regularly.

Mayor Grimes thanked the County for their efforts.

13-0529 Other Business

Commissioner Siler asked about the Agriculture Center and its location stating that people are saying they are not going to travel to Pittsboro to go to the center.

Commissioner Petty stated the County was waiting on Pittsboro to rezone the land.

The County Manager stated the rezoning was on the agenda for Pittsboro's next meeting.

Commissioner Petty stated the design of the building has been approved.

Commissioner Mike Constantino stated he had received a lot of calls from people saying Pittsboro doesn't want the center anymore.

Commissioner Petty stated Pittsboro has to rezone the property and that is where the project stands right now.

Commissioner Constantino asked why the center was being put in Pittsboro.

Commissioner Petty stated logistically, it is a good fit even though people think of the western side of the County as agricultural; however, the land is in Pittsboro.

Commissioner Siler stated he didn't think it was right to begin with for it to go to Pittsboro.

Commissioner Petty stated it is a government agency and there are a lot of government buildings in Pittsboro. It would be nice for them to be together. There is a lot of interaction between the government offices.

Commissioner Bock stated it is centrally located in the County.

Commissioner Cross stated it is also a civic center and will probably be used more as a civic center. There is no outdoor livestock center.

Commissioner Petty stated the Cooperative Extension does classes on a regular basis and in the current facility they have to turn people away because they do not have the space.

Commissioner Kost stated they impact all citizens and not just in agriculture. They do classes on bee keeping, wells, etc. She stated it takes her 45 minutes to get to Siler City from the other side of the County. She also said the County staff felt it was important for them to be close to other County staff.

Commissioner Constantino stated maybe some of that should have been part of the commentary, as it has not been.

Commissioner Cross stated it has been all along.

The County Manager stated it is an exhibition hall, an agricultural center, a civic center, and it is linked with the community college. Whether the town rezones the land will be decided on the 14th of October, and we will go from there.

Time was allowed for public input.

Roger Person, Siler City, asked the two boards about the Siler City ETJ and how they could guarantee that this [Chatham Randolph mega-site] is going to help Siler City. He stated 30 years ago, they did the same thing and it has been a burden, and was a big failure.

Mayor Grimes asked in what way had it been a burden.

Mr. Person stated the town doesn't have the people to go out and patrol the area.

Commissioner Kost stated the County just gave the Town 1.2 million for the mega site and invested 10 million dollars to Siler City with the Business Park. She said that the Board had not invested 10 million dollars in any other part of the County.

Mr. Person stated they couldn't even keep a chicken plant. He asked if they really thought this was going to bring people to the County.

Commissioner Bock stated that he did. He said there are no assurances, but they are willing to take the risk.

Commissioner Kost stated they have to do other things too. She stated what happens here impacts everyone in this County.

Mayor Grimes stated he feels comfortable that the Board of Commissioners will do everything within their power to help make it successful; however, it is a private enterprise. He said that if they build it, they will come; but if they don't, they surely will not come. He stated that they definitely will not get the industries with high paying jobs. If they do come, perhaps they will be a major water user. The public works department has to pay its own way. It cannot come out of the general fund. It depends on if people who are willing to invest see it as a good investment.

Commissioner Petty stated the Town and the County did everything they possibly could to keep Townsend here, but they just couldn't make it. To make sure the money wasn't wasted, it was tied to performance. He stated they are trying to be good stewards of the money.

The County Manager stated that the failure of the poultry plant had absolutely nothing to do with what government did or did not do. It had to do with the industry and competition and economy.

Commissioner Kost stated that Mr. Person has a good point in that if the mega-site does get a big auto plant, the money should be used to revitalize downtown.

Mr. Person stated he has poor feelings about the community college in this town.

Commissioner Petty stated this mega site needs a trained workforce and the community college will be the key and focus more on the trades industry.

Mayor Grimes stated that was all the more reason for the work force to go back to the community college.

Ann Bass asked if the community college will provide trades in addition to auto manufacturing.

Commissioner Bock stated yes. What they are looking to do is create programs in addition to auto manufacturing.

Nita Dukes asked if it is going to be one sole business at the mega-site.

Commissioner Petty stated it isn't being designed for one sole industry. In order for a piece of property to be considered, the property has to be certified. It can be used for any type of industry. The reason automotive keeps coming up is because it is a large employer. Once it is certified, it goes on the radar of the Department of Commerce. For example, when someone on the eastern seaboard looks for property, the certified property will pop up first.

Commissioner Bock stated there are no certified sites in North Carolina, so we will be the first and only.

Mayor Grimes stated some consultants that have come to talk to the EDC group have been talking about automotive manufacturing plants. There is no assurance they will come, but the consultants talk in those terms. They are also at capacity where they are, so they are looking to build plants somewhere else.

Commissioner Bock stated right now, they won't even look at Chatham County because it is not certified.

Ms. Reid stated this process is really being driven by private property owners. One has over 1,000 acres and used it for hunting. He started looking around and a mega-site is 1,000 acres or more. He started talking with the EDC and there is rail, a four-lane divided highway, and water and sewer infrastructure not too far away. They talked with another property owner to total 1,750 acres. That is so rare in terms of these large sites. There are typically 50-100 property owners in terms of these sites. Ms. Reid stated this is how it evolved. The key in moving it from this land, from something that is marketable, was having Duke Energy approve it for their site readiness program. They said Chatham really has something great here.

Commissioner Stewart stated the consultant said Chatham was more suited for automotive based on our work force, our property, and location.

Ms. Reid stated aerospace is also mentioned a lot.

Commissioner Cheek stated he is glad to see both boards working together because, if we don't take a chance, we will never know. He asked everyone to think positive.

Mayor Grimes stated one other thing about this site is there are no homes. Other sites have homes that are disrupted. This land is all forest or fields.

Mike Harrelson stated that we are taking two private land owners, and he assumed we have contracts with them. He asked how long do these private land owners have to it before they can sell after we make their land more valuable. If in ten years, what happens if this mega-site goes nowhere.

Mayor Grimes stated it had to be before the engineering study.

Commissioner Price stated the community college already has advanced manufacturing curriculum based out of Sanford. His nephew had an engineering degree from NC State University. When he finished, he went to CCCC for this curriculum. The community college would be glad to bring these programs to our area, but we don't have anything here to justify the need. This site would justify that need.

Commissioner Cindy Bray stated she teaches at one of the high schools, and the high schools work closely with the community college with several types of programs. She would like to see our graduates come back to Siler City to work, but they don't.

Commissioner Petty stated there is a program called K-14 where the kids take college classes in high school and can graduate with an associate's degree when they graduate from high school or start out as a junior in college.

Ann Bass stated she wished there would be some money for Siler City to help capture some of the activity they hope will happen when the tenants move in to the mega-site. They might be looking for quality of life issues in addition to the mega-site.

Dorothy Vascal asked how long it will take to get certified. Ms. Reid stated it would take six months from when the engineering is done, but it could be less.

Commissioner Stewart stated once they make a decision to certify us, they are ready to go.

Commissioner Petty stated something to consider is the general public won't even know who the tenant is going to be that Honda wouldn't want Hyundai to know what their plans are. We wouldn't be able to advertise.

Commissioner Bock stated that the certification is different than having a tenant.

Mayor Grimes stated that manufacturing is coming back, but the days of 19 cent gas are not. They are looking at transportation and quality control as well as location.

Commissioner Price stated he was not so sure they answered Ms. Bass' question. He stated that he believed what she meant was we need to be ready. They want culture, restaurants, and recreation, etc.

Commissioner Stewart stated once word gets out, those things will come.

Commissioner Kost stated that was the point she was trying to make as well about land use planning. She stated that they want to strengthen Siler City.

Albert Vestal thanked the Boards for their efforts.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Grimes adjourned the meeting at 7:47 PM.

Walter Petty, Chairman

ATTEST:

Sandra B. Sublett, CMC, NCCCC, Clerk to the Board
Chatham County Board of Commissioners