

**GRANVILLE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**February 23, 2024 - RETREAT DAY 2**  
**GRANVILLE EXPO AND CONVENTION CENTER**  
**4185 US Highway 15 South, Oxford, North Carolina**

**PRESENT:**

Chair Timothy Karan  
Vice Chair Jimmy Gooch  
Commissioner Zelodis Jay  
Commissioner Robert Williford  
Commissioner Sue Hinman  
Commissioner Tony W. Cozart  
Commissioner Russ May

County Manager Drew Cummings  
Assistant County Manager Korena Weichel  
County Attorney James C. Wrenn, Jr.

**CALL TO ORDER**

At 9:01 a.m. Chair Timothy Karan called the meeting to order. Commissioner Zelodis Jay had the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**FIRE COMMISSION PROGRESS UPDATE AND DISCUSSION**

Emergency Management Director Jason Reavis updated the Board on the expenditure of the \$20,000 part-time firefighter funds, noting delays in equipment due to production timelines but overall progress. He shared success stories of improved response times since implementing part-time staffing and highlighted the need for further evaluation, with plans to reassess in April. He also addressed the pending base fund disbursement, confirming funds were available despite minor fire department budget delays. Mr. Reavis discussed medical first responder training, detailing the approval process and upcoming sessions to enhance emergency medical care.

Andy Culbreth, Chair of the Granville County Fire Commission, discussed the pension fund for volunteer firefighters, noting variations in figures based on department rosters and vesting after 20 years of service. He explained the proposed 3.4% increase in base funding aligned with the CPI (consumer price index), highlighting variations due to factors like first responder services and part-time firefighter benefits. Expressing appreciation for the approved State matching grant, he requested an additional \$20,000 for the next year to maximize state grant benefits and addressed fund allocation for additional grants, aiming to assist departments in applying for various grants. He proposed a \$20,000 incentive per department to encourage the provision of first responder services, covering additional costs. Mr. Culbreth also touched on the issue of enhanced funding, with allocation based on a formula for equitable distribution, and outlined budget details, assuming full department participation while acknowledging potential variations in actual figures.

The following topics were also addressed:

- Commissioner Williford inquired about the handling of funds from fire department fundraisers. Mr. Reavis clarified that the funds remain in separate accounts for each department and are included in the budgeting process.
- Commissioner Williford sought confirmation if the fundraiser funds were used for fire departments' operations. Mr. Culbreth affirmed that the fundraiser funds were included in the budget submission for transparency.
- Commissioner Jay emphasized the need for equitable service provision in gray areas and expressed expectations for fair allocation of funds.

- County Manager Cummings mentioned ongoing discussions with adjacent County Managers regarding potential collaborations to address coverage gaps.
- Commissioner May clarified the distinction between fire department funds and County-provided fire tax funds, emphasizing the department's autonomy in fundraising.
- Commissioner Hinman questioned the possibility of transitioning to paid fire departments in the future. Mr. Reavis expressed uncertainty about the timeline for such a transition, acknowledging the decline in volunteerism but highlighting it as a distant possibility.
- Commissioner Jay raised concerns about staffing levels on fire trucks, emphasizing the need for adequate personnel for effective response. Commissioner May explained that the Board approved funds for additional workers on fire trucks and highlighted efforts to address staffing issues through budget allocations.
- Chair Karan emphasized ongoing discussions were in process and adjustments in fire department funding to ensure adequate service provision.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATE**

Human Resources Director Angela Miles provided an update on the County's employment status, focusing on recruitment, retention, compensation, benefits, and employee support. Key highlights included eliminating health insurance premium copays and reducing dependent coverage costs by 25%, resulting in a 5% increase in health insurance enrollment. The employer match for the 401k was increased from 1% to 2% for non-sworn positions, with plans to raise it to 5% for all employees in the future. Sworn positions get 5% per state law. Training opportunities were expanded, including LinkedIn Learning access and free safety training through the NEOGOV platform. A three-day leadership academy by Chatham County offered valuable skills training for department heads and supervisors.

Ms. Miles discussed high turnover rates in Social Services, the Sheriff's Office, and detention facilities, detailing the financial impact of turnover. Strategies to address recruitment and retention challenges included reviewing salary and benefits, increasing recruitment efforts, supporting professional development, and fostering employee appreciation programs. The competitiveness of the county's 401k match compared to neighboring counties was also discussed. She also reported that Granville County has 358 full-time and 82 part-time employees.

### **BREAK**

At 10:02 a.m. there was a short break.

### **FLEET MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

County Manager Drew Cummings introduced the topic of centralizing the County's fleet management, noting its complexity and the progress made in the first year. He introduced recent hire Management Analyst David Schexnayder, who had taken on fleet management responsibilities.

Management Analyst Schexnayder, transitioning from a 12-year career in industrial distribution to public service, expressed excitement about his new role. He reported on the fleet transition initiative's progress, highlighting successes such as being under budget with expenses below the allocated \$1.5 million and replacing 45 vehicles. Challenges included improving surplus procedures and end-user training. He expressed optimism about future cost savings and welcomed questions from the commissioners. The following topics were addressed:

- **Transition Timeline:** It was explained that vehicles would transition to the new fleet management system as needed, with an estimated timeline of three to four years.
- **Total Vehicle Count:** An estimate of around 150 vehicles owned or leased by the County was provided, with adjustments based on vehicle surpluses and replacements.
- **Vehicle Replacement Criteria:** Criteria for replacing vehicles, including mileage, age, and maintenance costs, were outlined, with priority given to vehicles meeting certain criteria.
- **Fleet Monitoring System:** It was clarified that the fleet monitoring system was active and could provide data on fuel usage, with plans for further utilization in cost estimation.
- **Tax on Lease Vehicles:** It was clarified that the County was not subject to a tax on lease vehicles, unlike other areas.
- **Electric Vehicle Consideration:** The importance of considering charging infrastructure before introducing electric vehicles into the fleet was acknowledged.
- **Importance of Telemetrics:** The significance of telemetrics for tracking vehicle usage and ensuring fiscal responsibility was emphasized, highlighting the benefits of modern technology in fleet management.

### SHERIFF'S OFFICE UPDATE

Sheriff Robert Fountain's presentation began with a five-minute video. His budget presentation focused on the need for additional resources and personnel in the Sheriff's Office. He highlighted the growing population and increased demand for law enforcement services in the County. Sheriff Fountain emphasized the importance of investing in technology and equipment to enhance the effectiveness of the department. He also discussed the need for competitive salaries and benefits to attract and retain qualified deputies.

Sheriff Fountain discussed staffing, diversity, community partnerships, inmate programs, and technological advancements. He highlighted efforts to recruit and retain staff, emphasizing the need to stay competitive with other agencies. He addressed demographic trends, the utilization of detention staff at the courthouse, and the importance of maintaining safety and security in schools through the School Resource Officer (SRO) program.

Sheriff Fountain presented based on the PowerPoint presentation included in the agenda packet.

The following topics were also addressed:

- Commissioner May referenced studies by the International City and County Management Association (ICMA) and the Center for Public Safety Management, emphasizing workload over population density in determining staffing levels. Sheriff Fountain emphasized the need to consider multiple sources of information and highlighted the importance of population density in his staffing decisions.
- Commissioner May inquired about investigator caseloads and solvability rates to assess workload and staffing needs. Sheriff Fountain provided details on investigator caseloads and highlighted the Sheriff's Office's responsiveness to active cases.
- Commissioner May asked about the development of a vehicle policy within the Sheriff's Office. Sheriff Fountain confirmed the implementation of a vehicle policy, outlining restrictions on civilian transportation and out-of-county travel without prior approval.
- Commissioner Williford sought clarification on the 40-mile travel restriction, which Sheriff Fountain explained as starting from the county line.
- Commissioner May inquired about the Sheriff's Office's training policy regarding the successful completion of Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) and its impact on employment conditions. Sheriff Fountain explained his authority to make decisions regarding BLET participants based on individual circumstances and cited instances of individuals being recycled through training due to various reasons.
- Commissioner May stressed the importance of having written standards to ensure fairness and consistency in employment decisions. Sheriff Fountain clarified his authority

under North Carolina General Statute as an at-will employer but acknowledged the need to abide by federal rules and regulations.

- Commissioner Williford inquired about the use of national average versus state average in determining deputy population ratios, which Sheriff Fountain clarified by stating that they use county-specific data for such calculations.
- Commissioner Williford expressed appreciation for the potential increase in courtroom safety and emphasized the importance of upgrading security measures to ease concerns for judges, district attorneys, and lawyers. Sheriff Fountain elaborated on the efforts to enhance courthouse security, including obtaining quotes from multiple companies and collaborating with judicial officials to implement new security measures.
- Commissioner Williford voiced support for School Resource Officers (SROs) and discussed ongoing discussions with Representative Sossamon regarding potential funding for SRO programs.
- Commissioner Williford inquired about the revenue generated from the detention center and its allocation, with County Manager Cummings explaining that a portion is allocated towards debt service. He also mentioned a dedicated internal Finance person.
- Sheriff Fountain mentioned plans to explore a new commissary vendor for the detention center to enhance revenue generation.
- Robert Bailess mentioned the Sheriff's consideration of coordinating a comprehensive policy among law enforcement agencies in response to the findings of a recent shooting report.
- Commissioner Cozart asked about courthouse security and housing federal inmates. He thanked Sheriff Fountain for building relationships with students at the schools with SROs.
- Commissioner Jay inquired about the placement of Crime Stoppers phone number on county vehicles, to which Sheriff Fountain mentioned plans to add them along with other statistics. Commissioner Jay also talked about the importance of SROs at schools.

Chair Karan stated that the Board is here to support the Sheriff and staff.

### **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVIEW**

Planning Director Barry Baker highlighted the significance of the Comprehensive Plan and its role in zoning regulations in North Carolina. He mentioned that since 2021, jurisdictions in the State must have a comprehensive plan to enforce zoning regulations.

Planning Director Baker spoke from the PowerPoint presentation included in the Agenda packet.

Mr. Baker provided background information on the County's comprehensive plan, noting that the 2018 plan replaced the one adopted in 2002 and incorporated various transportation and recreation-related plans from 2002 to 2018. He mentioned extensive community involvement in the planning process, including surveys, open houses, and meetings, which took a year and a half to reach adoption. Community concerns regarding the impact of development on schools and the desire for increased commercial presence were addressed in the plan. The vision outlined in the comprehensive plan aimed to maintain rural character while fostering vibrant destinations, a healthy economy, and sustainable growth.

Mr. Baker highlighted the following goals and implementations:

1. Goal 1: Protect rural character
  - a. Implemented through voluntary ag districts and subdivision regulations preserving open space and requiring rural buffers.
2. Goal 2: Expand economic development and business opportunities
  - a. Efforts include maintaining existing industrial base, seeking new employers, and the development of Triangle North.
3. Goal 3: Partner with and support municipalities

- a. Collaboration with municipalities on transportation-related boards, watershed management, and recreation boards.
4. Goal 4: Provide infrastructure, community services and facilities
  - a. Efforts include expanding water and sewer capacities, broadband expansion, and transportation planning.
5. Goal 5: Provide mix of housing opportunities
  - a. Zoning regulations allow various housing types including single-wides, double-wides, modulars, and site-built homes, along with accessory dwellings.
6. Goal 6: Recreational open space assets
  - a. Implemented through open space requirements in subdivision regulations, addition of recreational facilities, and development of walking trails.
7. Goal 7: Well-designed and interconnected communities
  - Includes vegetated buffers in subdivision regulations, conservation cluster subdivision options, and encouragement of annexation agreements among municipalities.

Key points regarding continued work needed in implementation include:

- Continued work needed to limit retail leakage and increase commercial base to retain sales tax revenue within Granville County.
- Focus on enhancing water and sewer capacities in southern Granville to accommodate projected economic growth by 2027.
- Emphasis on protecting agricultural land in rural areas through land use tools to control density.
- Preservation of mobility on key thoroughfares by collaborating with CAMPO, RPO, and NCDOT to reduce congestion and promote alternative transportation methods.
- Importance of community involvement in the Northwest area study to address future planning needs.
- Encouragement of annexation agreements between municipalities to provide clarity for developers and streamline development processes.

Implementation efforts for the upcoming year to include:

- Continued collaboration with CAMPO on the northwest study for future planning efforts.
- Initiation of the implementation of the recreation plan.
- Investigation into the creation of a new rural commercial district, potentially through a conditional zoning district, in line with the comp plan's encouragement of rural commercial zoning with limitations on building size.
- Utilization of the future land use map and comp plan to study several commercial nodes, including NC 96 and 56, Hester and 15, Lawrence and Bruce Garner, Cornwall and 96, and Tuning and 15, with upcoming rezoning discussions on NC 96 and 56 in March.

Commissioner Hinman brought up the topic of solar farms, expressing concern about the impact they may have on forest and open land in northern Granville. Mr. Baker acknowledged that solar farms would indeed be a significant issue in the area in the near future. He emphasized that rezoning for solar farms is a legislative process, not quasi-judicial, and public opinions, including those of commissioners and residents, hold weight in the decision-making process. He highlighted that while some approved solar farms have been relatively small, others have spanned several hundred acres, potentially altering the landscape significantly. Mr. Baker said that the matter would be addressed in his presentation after lunch.

### LUNCH

At 12:06 p.m. there was a break for lunch. The retreat resumed at 12:52 p.m.

## **DEVELOPMENT SERVICES UPDATE – SCOTT PHILLIPS AND BARRY BAKER**

### **Capital Improvement Plan Project Updates**

Development Services Director Scott Phillips provided an overview of active and pending capital improvement projects, detailing progress, funding, and timelines. He discussed completed designs for the Northern Granville Senior Center and repairs at the Granville Athletic Park. The Hunt Street Demolition project and Triangle North Granville utility infrastructure projects were also highlighted. Mr. Phillips outlined pending projects for the next fiscal year, including Hunt Street design development and a courthouse space-needs study. He emphasized the importance of evaluating the ten-year capital improvement plan and enhancing facility maintenance and repair services.

Development Services Director Scott Phillips spoke from the PowerPoint presentation included in the agenda packet. Key points and highlights included:

- Design completion for the Northern Granville Senior Center, with a bid date set for March 19th.
- Ongoing walking trail repairs at the Granville Athletic Park, with bid evaluation underway.
- Plans for asbestos abatement and building demolition at the former Granville Vance District Public Health building.
- Progress on utility infrastructure projects, including waterline and sewer evaluations at Triangle North Granville.
- Updates on the ABC store project, Berea Library, Expo generator, and Cooperative Extension cooking kitchen.
- Pending projects for the next fiscal year, such as Hunt Street design development and courthouse space needs study.
- Evaluating and prioritizing the 10-year capital improvement plan.
- Focus on enhancing facility maintenance and repair services, including preventative maintenance programs and staff reviews.

The following topics were also discussed:

- Chair Karan acknowledged the extensive agenda and briefly discussed the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) overview.
- Commissioner Williford inquired about staffing adequacy for maintenance, to which Phillips expressed the need for additional staff.
- Commissioner Jay raised concerns about the future of the 122 Williamsboro Street building known as the “polka dot building,” prompting Phillips to discuss plans for its demolition and potential courthouse expansion.
- Safety concerns regarding the polka dot building's structural integrity were discussed, with Phillips reassuring its stability.
- Chair Karan suggested exploring partnership opportunities for building projects.
- Phillips highlighted potential EMS station needs and discussed future plans for the Hunt Street project.
- The discussion transitioned to inspections and further agenda items.
- Phillips addressed questions regarding building height regulations and parking space availability in downtown Oxford.

### **Inspections**

Development Services Director Phillips provided updates on staffing levels and recent hires in the Inspections Department. He highlighted the increase in building permits issued across various townships and permit categories, as well as the corresponding rise in permit revenues. Mr. Phillips also presented a fiscal year trend showing a significant revenue increase compared to the previous year. He emphasized the successful implementation of fee increases without any complaints and discussed accomplishments such as the creation of building permit application guides and the training of new inspectors.

Development Services Director Phillips spoke from the PowerPoint presentation included in the agenda packet. Key points and highlights included:

- Building permits issued by townships showed significant activity, particularly in Brassfield and Oxford.
- The department experienced increases in residential, commercial, and trade permits issued.
- Permit revenues saw a substantial increase, with \$226,000 more in revenue in 2023 compared to 2022.
- The fiscal year trend indicated a positive revenue trajectory, with projections of \$900,000 in permit revenue.
- Despite fee increases, there were no complaints from contractors or homeowners.
- Site inspections workload saw a slight increase compared to the previous year.
- Accomplishments for the previous year included creating building permit application guides, implementing a new fee structure, and training new building code inspectors.
- Phillips highlighted the challenges of regulatory work and emphasized the importance of effective communication with the public.

### **Planning and Zoning Updates**

Planning Director Barry Baker provided an overview of planning statistics, focusing on zoning permits issued in the unincorporated parts of the county. He noted a 14% decline in zoning permits issued in 2023 compared to the previous year, with most permits concentrated in the southern townships. The majority of permits were for single-family dwellings, with a significant portion being site-built homes. Mr. Baker discussed the approval of minor subdivisions and the anticipation of recorded lots from previous years. He highlighted the upcoming northwest area study, focusing on transportation and land use issues. Additionally, he addressed concerns regarding solar farms and legislative actions related to rezoning.

Planning Director Baker spoke from the PowerPoint presentation included in the agenda packet. Key points and highlights included:

- Total zoning permits issued in 2023 declined by 14% compared to the previous year.
- 68% of zoning permits were issued in the four southernmost townships.
- 42% of countywide zoning permits were for single-family dwellings.
- 64% of single-family dwellings were site-built.
- 56 out of 67 single-family dwellings were site-built homes.
- Only 13 lots were recorded in major subdivisions in 2023, but more are expected to be recorded in the future.
- Major subdivisions were primarily approved in the Oxford area.

The following topics were also mentioned or discussed:

- The Northwest Area Study will focus on transportation and land use issues.
- Concerns were raised about the increasing size of proposed solar farms and their impact on rural areas versus restricting them to industrial areas. Mr. Baker explained the historical context of solar farm policies and highlighted challenges posed by the size of proposed solar farms
- Clarification on the distinction between lots and subdivisions and Mr. Baker confirmed that the 13 recorded entities were individual lots

Mr. Baker and his staff were commended for their work on planning initiatives and transportation needs.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATE**

DSS Director LaToya Toussaint presented a comprehensive overview of the Department of Social Services (DSS), highlighting its role as an agent of the state of North Carolina and its various performance areas. She discussed revenue generation, organizational structure adjustments, staffing updates, and departmental priorities. Additionally, she provided insights into upcoming legislative changes affecting DSS and outlined future challenges and initiatives.

DSS Director Toussaint spoke from the PowerPoint presentation included in the agenda packet. Key points and highlights included:

- DSS operates under state and federal regulations, contributing over \$5 million annually to the county's revenue.
- Benefit administration includes services such as Medicaid, SNAP, workforce employment, and program integrity.
- Currently fully staffed in direct care services, with vacancies primarily in Medicaid expansion positions and child support.
- Priorities include organizational structure adjustments, meeting performance regulations, enhancing fiscal accountability, and staff training.
- Emphasized the importance of local policy and procedure development to meet state and federal requirements.
- Recognized county efforts in providing raises and mid-year bonuses to DSS staff.
- Discussed upcoming legislative changes, including Medicaid expansion and foster care rate increases.
- Highlighted challenges in Medicaid caseloads, increased workload due to Medicaid expansion, and future budget implications.
- Shared insights into child welfare services, adult protection, and child support, including caseloads and challenges.
- Addressed future challenges such as audit paybacks, lack of resources, staff retention, and legislative uncertainties.

The following topics were also discussed:

- Commissioner May inquired about the state funding for various programs and whether it would result in a financial wash or require additional county payments. Ms. Toussaint explained that funding varied for each program, with some potentially being a wash and others requiring additional funding, highlighting the complexity of DSS funding.
- Commissioner Williford asked about the limitations on reimbursements based on family circumstances, receiving clarification from Ms. Toussaint.
- Commissioner Hinman expressed concern about the workload of fraud investigators and questioned their inclusion in pay raises. Ms. Toussaint acknowledged the workload and expressed plans to address staffing needs in the future.

## **BREAK**

At 2:21 p.m., the Board took a short break. The retreat resumed at 2:31 p.m.

## **GRANVILLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS UPDATE**

Dr. Winborne began by acknowledging the attendees and introducing members of the Board of Education and administrative staff. He expressed gratitude for the joint meeting and provided highlights of the discussions held during the meeting. Dr. Winborne discussed various partnerships and collaborations between the school district and other entities, such as athletics

facilities and the public library system. Updates on safety measures were provided, including the status of school resource officers (SROs) and efforts to enhance safety protocols.

The School Board presented based on the PowerPoint presentation included in the agenda packet.

Academic goals were outlined, focusing on eliminating low-performing schools, achieving academic growth, and improving proficiency rates. Efforts to address staff vacancies and improve teacher recruitment and retention were highlighted as critical factors for academic success. Attendance initiatives, including revisions to the attendance policy and increased referrals for truancy, were discussed. Data on student behavior, including reductions in office referrals and suspensions, were presented.

Dr. Winborne expressed optimism about the progress made during the school year and emphasized the importance of creating a positive school environment. Commissioner Cozart expressed support for efforts to maintain order and discipline in schools.

Finance Director Vickie Hines delved into the breakdown of the school district's funding sources, highlighting categories such as operating funds, capital funds, grant funds, and administration funds. Ms. Hines provided a detailed overview of the current year's budget allocation, emphasizing the distribution of funds across different expense categories and explaining discrepancies in totals due to the utilization of fund balance. She also discussed the historical enrollment trends between Granville County Public Schools and charter schools, underscoring the obligation to allocate per-pupil funding proportionally. Ms. Hines addressed ongoing challenges, including the impending expiration of ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funding, rising costs, and competition for staff retention and student enrollment. She emphasized the district's proactive approach to addressing these challenges and ensuring the continued success of Granville County Public Schools.

Dr. Winborne outlined the funding priorities for the district, emphasizing their commitment to self-sufficiency before seeking additional funding. He clarified that the district would not request financial support to offset the impending expiration of federal COVID-19 funds but would instead manage the situation by cutting positions and programs. Efforts to maximize efficiency included reducing senior staff positions and implementing zero-based budgeting in departments to identify potential savings. Energy efficiency was highlighted as an area for potential cost reduction through measures such as LED lighting and solar panel installation. The main priorities included the third installment of the state-mandated salary increase, increasing continuation funds for locally funded positions, addressing recruitment and retention challenges, and boosting capital outlay funding to support facility improvements. Dr. Winborne delegated the detailed discussion of each priority to Ms. Hines.

Ms. Hines elaborated on the district's funding priorities, starting with the decompression plan funding, which addresses the state-mandated minimum wage for classified employees. She expressed gratitude for the partnership between the board and the employees in managing this unfunded mandate. The continuation funds were highlighted next, focusing on the challenges posed by increasing costs such as health insurance and retirement. Ms. Hines emphasized the need to maintain competitiveness in staff recruitment and retention, particularly in light of competition from larger, well-funded counties. The proposal included increasing the local supplement for classroom-based certified staff to 14% and enhancing the classified supplement to recognize their significant contributions. Advanced degree pay, defunded by the state, was also discussed as part of the retention strategy. Finally, Ms. Hines addressed the capital outlay and master facility plan, underscoring the critical need for an increase in funding to address deferred maintenance in school buildings. She provided a summary of the priorities, acknowledging the complexity of the numbers and inviting questions for clarification.

The following topics were also discussed:

- Commissioner May inquired about the current fund balance, which Ms. Hines projected to be around 6.5% by the end of the fiscal year, estimated at about \$6 to \$7 million.
- Commissioner Hinman expressed concern about the decision not to close certain schools and its impact on cost savings, to which Dr. Winborne explained the complexities involved in school closures and the delicate balance between efficiency and disruption.
- Commissioner Gooch asked about the temporary relocation of Hawley School and plans for its future, prompting Dr. Winborne to discuss the uncertainty surrounding the campus's fate and the need for a plan B.
- Commissioner Gooch also questioned the decision to use one-time funds for recurring expenses, to which Dr. Winborne and Ms. Hines explained the rationale behind using ESSR funds for instructional support positions and the school's commitment to managing these positions through attrition.
- Commissioner Cozart commended the school staff for their dedication to serving students with diverse needs.
- Commissioner May thanked Dr. Winborne for his communication efforts and expressed support for investing in education within the means provided by the county.
- Chair Karan emphasized the need for strategic decision-making regarding school facilities and funding allocations.
- Commissioner Hinman inquired about the charging infrastructure for electric buses, leading Dr. Winborne to discuss the installation of charging stations at the bus garage and potential upgrades to the power grid.
- Commissioner Jay raised concerns about student safety related to transportation, urging the school to explore solutions.

Dr. Winborne thanked the Board and extended an invitation to visit the schools, while Chair Williams expressed excitement about the direction of focusing resources closer to the classroom.

### **COUNTY MANAGER UPDATES**

County Manager Drew Cummings discussed various topics ranging from capital improvement plans to economic development and broadband expansion. He emphasized the importance of past accomplishments while outlining ongoing and future initiatives. Discussion included updates on the fire tax investment, landfill operations RFP, economic development efforts, Triangle North developments, ten-year capital improvement plan, fleet management, benefit and pay improvements, succession planning, listening sessions, property revaluation, network security, asset forfeiture review, broadband expansion, cooperative work with the sheriff's office, and groundwater issues. Key takeaways and accomplishments included:

- Discussion on the fire tax investment and improved first responder incentives to enhance emergency response capabilities.
- Importance of the landfill operations RFP and its impact on the county's financial interests and quality of life.
- Rebuilding efforts in the economic development department with the hiring of a new director and redirecting inquiries to the county.
- Updates on Triangle North developments, including pending sales, water and sewer progress, and grant applications.
- Progress on the 10-year capital improvement plan, emphasizing the need for debt funding to manage construction projects.
- Efforts to improve benefit and pay structures within the county budget while addressing turnover rates and staff training costs.

- Ongoing work on succession planning, network security, asset forfeiture review, and broadband expansion initiatives.
- Cooperative relationship with the sheriff's office and recruitment efforts for key positions within the county.
- Engagement on groundwater issues, including legal analysis and discussions on zoning and utility matters.

Management Analyst David Schexnayder shared projections regarding population growth and unemployment rates. The state demographer's office projected a population of about 66,000 by 2030, with Granville's unemployment rate mirroring that of neighboring Durham and Wake counties, though remaining significantly lower than the state average. Sales tax collection rates were also examined, showing a projected shortfall of approximately \$450,000 from the budgeted amount for the fiscal year, attributed to a statewide trend of reduced spending rates amidst economic uncertainty. Key takeaways included:

- Projected population growth of 66,000 by 2030 according to the state demographer's office.
- Granville's unemployment rate mirroring that of neighboring Durham and Wake counties, with under a thousand actively seeking jobs in the county.
- Sales tax collection rate showing a projected shortfall of approximately \$450,000 from the budgeted amount for the fiscal year, attributed to a statewide trend of reduced spending rates.

Public Information Officer Terry Hobgood shared various data points regarding personal income, housing statistics, and housing costs in Granville County. Personal income and expenditure per person both increased over the past decade, with recent income drops despite rising expenses. Housing data shows a drop in listings and sales in recent years, leading to a sharp rise in median sales prices. Additionally, approximately 76% of housing in Granville County is owner-occupied, with median monthly housing costs for mortgage holders at \$1,400 and renters spending about 28% of their income on housing. Key takeaways included:

- Personal income and expenditure per person have increased over the past decade.
- Recent income drops despite rising expenses.
- A drop in listings and sales has led to a sharp rise in median sales prices.
- Approximately 76% of housing in Granville County is owner-occupied.
- Median housing costs per month for mortgage holders are \$1,400, with renters spending about 28% of their income on housing.

Chair Karan raised a question regarding sales tax, specifically mentioning Article 46, which allows for additional County option sales taxes with restrictions on their use, typically related to transit or transportation. County Manager Cummings acknowledged this and suggested providing commissioners with information about additional optional sales taxes that could be levied through local referendums. Chair Karan highlighted the concern of citizens bearing a significant portion of the sales tax burden due to purchasing goods outside the county, resulting in leakage of revenue. This leakage occurs because neighboring counties often have higher sales tax rates, such as 8% compared to Granville County's 6%.

### **FOLLOW-UP AND KEY TAKEAWAYS**

Commissioner Jay thanked County Manager Cummings and the staff for their reports and budgets. He appreciated the information provided over the past two days, noting that the County was preparing for future growth rather than waiting for it to happen. He highlighted the importance of financial stability, the growth of the hospital, and the need for more EMTs. He

acknowledged the support from legislators in bringing funds to the county. He also mentioned that Human Resources reported progress in not being just a training ground for other communities. Commissioner Jay said he appreciated the municipalities' focus on growth and the presentations from various departments, including DSS and the school system. He noted the challenge of finding additional funds for all departments, including the fire department. He was pleased with the County's forward-looking approach, especially in addressing fire protection for gray areas.

Commissioner Williford mentioned that it was his second budget retreat. He expressed gratitude to the staff and thanked the chairman for keeping the team on task and on schedule. He praised the Fire Commission for their work, noting the influx of funds for fire protection and expressing hope for a future 24/7 funded paid Volunteer Fire Department. He said he is excited about the Triangle North possibilities and its potential benefits for the county in the next two to three years. He emphasized the need for better benefits packages to compete with surrounding counties, including improved health insurance and 401k plans, and stressed the importance of not forgetting long-term employees. He highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong maintenance department to avoid bigger expenses later. He appreciated Sheriff Fountain's improved presentation and noted areas for further improvement. He anticipated growth in Granville County and emphasized the need for partnerships with municipalities. He commended the DSS Director Toussaint and the commissioners on the DSS board for their work and praised the School Board, expressing confidence in their efforts.

Commissioner Hinman reflected on her emotional connection to the annual budget retreat, expressing deep appreciation for the county's employees and volunteers. She was pleased about the recent bonuses or raises given to them and aspired to eventually pay them what they deserve to prevent them from leaving for better-paying counties. She emphasized the importance of maintaining county buildings and regretted not addressing repairs earlier, which could have saved some structures. She expressed disappointment with the Sheriff's unclear feedback on a particular issue, though she acknowledged improvements in his presentation this year. Commissioner Hinman expressed frustration regarding the Board of Education's handling of school closures. She believed the board's decision to close three schools, while only actually closing one and repurposing the others, caused unnecessary community trouble. She criticized the school board's choice of meeting venues, which limited public participation, and questioned the utilization of certain school facilities. She was upset about the continued use of a building that she felt should be demolished and voiced frustration over unresolved maintenance issues, such as unrepaired electrical wires. Despite her complaints, she concluded by reaffirming her high regard for the county's staff and employees, considering them the best in the country.

Commissioner Cozart reflected on the county's financial situation and how it compares to the uncertainties faced in 2009. He noted that this year brought unique challenges, particularly concerning the upkeep of county buildings and economic development efforts. He expressed concerns about the ongoing costs of maintaining competitive salaries and benefits for county employees, highlighting the impact on the budget. He mentioned the complexities surrounding the DSS situation and the associated costs, emphasizing the importance of understanding the full extent of these financial commitments. With property revaluations and tax rate decisions looming, he urged the importance of relying on the County Manager's recommendations, given the intricate and unpredictable nature of the budget. Commissioner Cozart praised the County Manager for his progressive approach, particularly in collaborating with the superintendent on shared maintenance efforts for schools. He concluded by emphasizing the need for flexibility and trust in the County Manager's recommendations, acknowledging the complexity of the current financial landscape and the long-term implications of their decisions.

Commissioner May thanked the county staff, department heads, and all county employees for their dedication, particularly acknowledging the County Manager and Deputy County Manager

for handling the year's challenges. He emphasized the importance of managing the budget effectively, ensuring that spending aligns with actual needs rather than wants. May expressed his desire to see budget discipline and efficient use of funds, noting that returning unused budgeted funds would be commendable. He highlighted the necessity of providing employees with a safe work environment and the tools needed to perform their duties effectively. Specifically, he pointed out the essential nature of EMS services and other critical needs within the county. May emphasized the importance of the county not being left behind in terms of employee compensation and operational efficiency, aiming for a highly professional organization that citizens can be proud of. Commissioner May expressed respect for the County Manager's decisions while indicating he might push back on the CIP prioritization to ensure it is equitable and proportionate to the tax base. He praised the direction of the fire commission and credited the County Manager for working with them.

Commissioner Gooch expressed gratitude to his fellow commissioners and acknowledged that many topics had already been covered, leaving little for him to add. He made a lighthearted comment about needing millions for an ambulance, highlighting the importance of emergency services. Gooch thanked everyone who attended the meeting and those who made presentations, as well as the County Manager and staff for their hard work in preparation. He reflected on the increasing prices and needs across various sectors, suggesting the importance of prioritizing wants, needs, and essentials in budget allocation. Gooch emphasized the significance of addressing essential needs first, followed by other necessities, and then considering discretionary spending if resources permit. He concluded by expressing satisfaction with the day's discussions and progress made.

Chair Karan expressed gratitude to the staff for organizing the retreat, acknowledging that such events mark a starting point rather than a conclusion. He highlighted the county's efforts in repurposing resources and adapting to new technologies to meet evolving needs. Karan noted the upcoming budget process and expressed curiosity about the results of the property revaluation. He discussed the complexities of calculating percentage changes in property assessments and cautioned against jumping to conclusions based solely on these figures. Karan referenced a misunderstanding about landfill operations, illustrating how misinformation can spread easily in the age of social media. He emphasized the importance of thorough consideration and accurate information in decision-making. In closing, Chair Karan mentioned potential changes to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and invited any final comments or motions before adjourning the meeting.

#### **BOARD APPROVED EASEMENT ACQUISITION REGARDING TRIANGLE NORTH GRANVILLE**

County Attorney Wrenn provided an update on the progress regarding Triangle North. He mentioned successfully acquiring easements from property owners along Tabbs Creek Road for the water line project to the park. Attorney Wrenn sought authorization from the board to accept these easements and proceed with the project. The easements were obtained from several individuals and the Kerr-Tar Regional Economic Development Corporation. Once construction is completed, the easements will be transferred to the City of Oxford.

Motioned by Commissioner Sue Hinman, seconded by Commissioner Robert Williford, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the easement acquisition on Tabbs Creek Road and authorized staff to accept the waterline easements from Elizabeth Lane, William Spencer Dean and wife, Deborah W. Dean, Kerr-Tar Regional Economic Development Corporation, and Duke Hayes Rentals, LLC.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Motioned by Commissioner Sue Hinman, seconded by Commissioner Zelodis Jay, and unanimously carried, the Board adjourned at 5:02 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,  
Debra A. Weary, NCMCC, CMC  
Clerk to the Board