

**RICHMOND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
PLANNING RETREAT
THE NATIONAL GOLF CLUB, PINEHURST, NC
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2008, 1:00 P.M.
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2008, 8:00 A.M.**

The Richmond County Board of Commissioners met on Monday, February 18, 2008 at 1:00 P.M. at The National Golf Club in the Board Room of the Ramsey Cottage, Pinehurst, North Carolina, for a two-day Planning Retreat. The following were present: Chairman Kenneth R. Robinette; Vice-Chairman John B. Garner; Commissioners Pamela N. Dillman, Jimmy L. Maske, and J. C. Watkins.

Commissioners Thad Ussery and Paul Wilson, Jr. were absent due to illness.

Staff present: County Manager James E. Haynes,; County Attorney Stephan R. Futrell; Clerk Marian S. Savage. Director of Development Rick Sago and Director of Community Services B. K. Jones joined the Retreat later in the afternoon. Daily Journal reporter Tom MacCallum was also present.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Robinette at 1:00 P.M.

ITEM NO. 1 – INVOCATION

The invocation was delivered by Commissioner J. C. Watkins, who remembered the two Commissioners who were absent.

Welcome remarks were offered by Chairman Robinette, and facilitator Chris Aycock of Aycock Associates, was introduced. Mr. Ron Aycock also participated in discussions later in the meeting.

Mr. Aycock advised that development of goals would be the topic of discussion until 5:00 P.M.

In the first exercise, each Board member was asked to share two truths and one lie about themselves.

The Board then began discussion to assess the County and discussed available opportunities in Richmond County:

- * good workforce*
- *development of tourism*
- *prime central location in the State*
- *good road system*
- * border to South Carolina*
- *great water resources and other natural resources*
- *opportunity to attract industry and distribution centers*
- * historic landmarks*
- *available land for development*
- * excellent community college (1 of 52 in North Carolina)*

- *opportunity to develop recreation*
- *good “people factor”*
- *good cultural atmosphere; arts*
- *Cole Auditorium*
- *good working relationship with municipalities*
- *opportunity to develop relationship with different ethnic groups*
- *good climate*
- *opportunity to expand mining operations*

In further discussion, the Board listed the following issues as threats or challenges to the County:

- *negative attitudes*
- *resistance to change*
- *lack of motivation*
- *education level; high dropout rate and low test scores*
- *maintain communication with municipalities*
- *availability of information reveals weaknesses of the County*
- *tax rate is a challenge; where is the rate headed next year?*
- *tax rate is a direct correlation to industry recruitment*
- *community pride is a challenge*
- *citizenship*
- *disposal of solid waste must be faced*
- *race relations is an issue that must be faced*
- *young people are at risk; gang and drug problems are an issue*
- *meeting demands of public safety is a huge funding challenge - law enforcement; funding of a new judicial center*
- *state mandates continue to force funding obligations on counties – DOT road construction could become such a mandate*
- *educating the public on what is offered through Emergency Services*

Commissioner Garner remarked that education can overcome any barrier

In discussion of the County’s strengths, the following list was developed:

- *qualified county staff*
- *the Board does not micro-manage; allows staff to do their jobs*
- *the County’s day-to-day business is conducted in the open*
- *the County has 4 industrial parks*
- *good diversity on the Board of Commissioners*
- * successes in Economic Development*
- * clean water*
- * expansion of County water system was done at expense of Progress Energy*
- *very good participation by public utilities in community projects*
- *allowing staff to resolve problems*
- * good management of water resources*
- *strong relationship with Department of Commerce and N. C. Southeast*
- *availability of funds to remain competitive in Economic Development*
- *Economic Development packages are readily available*

**good management of Fund Balance*

The following items were cited as weaknesses or areas needing improvement:

- *County Administration Building needs renovation; entrance lobby does not project good image;*
- *Evaluations of all employees are needed for merit purposes*
- *Capital Reserve Fund needed to set aside funds toward renovation of County Admin. Building*
- *Need for succession plan to fill positions of county employees who are approaching retirement*
- *County is very lean in personnel*
- *County must compete against higher paying private sector employers for key positions such as Economic Developer*

In further discussion, the Board ranked the following items as top priorities:

- *Economic Development; land available for industry*
- *Education*
- *Budgeting; tax rate; property values*
- *Expansion of infrastructure*
- *Clean Environment*
- *Need for renovation of county offices; new positive image*
- *Public Safety*
- *Human Relations/Quality of Life*
- *Building Community; improved communication; educating the public; improving attitudes*
- *Succession plan/retention of staff*

Facilitator Ron Aycock suggested an incentive plan to insure continuation of services.

Commissioner Dillman recommended that all employees should be eligible for merit increases.

County Manager Haynes and Chairman Robinette advised that employee reviews are performed by department heads and merit increases are granted at the discretion of department heads.

Commissioner Maske referenced the County's longevity pay plan and 401-K Plan for all employees.

County Manager Haynes commented on the self insurance plan and advised that he had recently learned that 850 prescriptions are filled per month by the County's 350 employees.

After discussion of the County's strengths, weaknesses, and priorities, the following goals were developed:

- 1) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – CREATE NEW AND EXPANDED INDUSTRY AND JOBS; INCREASE TAX BASE WITH DIVERSIFIED ECONOMY*
- 2) EDUCATION – PARTNER WITH SCHOOLS TO PRODUCE BETTER EDUCATED WORKERS WITH SKILLS AND PROMOTE GOOD CITIZENSHIP. ENCOURAGE RICHMOND COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO EXPAND VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS.*

- 3) *COMPARE BEST PRACTICES IN OTHER SIMILAR COUNTIES TO BUILD BETTER COMMUNITY RELATIONS – IMPROVE APATHY IN THE COMMUNITY.*
- 4) *PUBLIC SAFETY – IMPROVEMENT NEEDED TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ON AVAILABLE EMERGENCY SERVICES AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS. LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUDICIAL SYSTEM ARE BIG FACTORS IN THE BUDGET.*
- 5) *JOB RETENTION/SUCCESSION*
- 6) *INFRASTRUCTURE ON I-73; EXPANSION OF INDUSTRIAL PARKS*
- 7) *SET ASIDE FUNDS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT*

Commissioner Garner emphasized the responsibility for the budget that Commissioners share with the County Manager.

In discussion of the Board's goals, it was agreed that the tentative list of goals is broad and needs more specifics. Commissioner Maske stressed the need to focus on the tax rate. Commissioner Watkins felt that specifics to attaining goals should be discussed. Commissioner Dillman acknowledged that problems are being identified but felt that perhaps a time limit should be set on accomplishing goals. It was consensus of the Board that Economic Development is a top priority. Chairman Robinette commented on the great success that the county has enjoyed in the past year and that the County must remain on course.

The Board developed the following list of Objectives:

- 1) *New industry to locate in Richmond County and create new tax base of \$80,000,000 and net increase of 300 jobs within 5 years*
- 2) *Collaborate with Rockingham , Ellerbe, Hamlet on sewer expansion; begin dialogue with the municipalities immediately.*
- 3) *Expand industrial park – within the next 5 years consider purchase of more land for another industrial park and continue joint efforts with municipalities*
- 4) *Budget \$250,000.00 per year for the next 5 years toward all capital projects.*
- 5) *Building community – partner with the Chamber, municipalities, and Development Team to compare best practices of other counties in an effort to end apathy and motivate citizens; begin discussion by June*
- 6) *Public Safety – County Attorney Futrell suggested talking with the 3 other counties in the judicial district to discuss common problems and how to make the system more efficient district-wide; include jail issue; begin discussion by Spring 2009*

County Manager Haynes discussed budgeting and how Revaluation and the tax rate impact the budget. Mr. Haynes noted that after the Revaluation before the last, the tax rate had remained the same for 8 years. Mr. Haynes explained that Fund Balance is set to fluctuate as needed to balance the budget.

At 5:15 P.M. the meeting recessed for a dinner break, with the meeting to reconvene at 7:00 P.M.

The meeting reconvened at 7:35 P.M. with discussion of "How Boards Relate."

Facilitator Ron Aycock lead the discussion, noting that Board can only act collectively and must try to work together as a full board in order to be effective. Mr. Aycock focused on the following points as ground rules for effective boards as recommended by consultant Roger Schwarz:

- 1) Test assumptions and inferences*
- 2) Share all relevant information*

County Manager Haynes remarked that he provides information to Board members before meetings and he provides the same information to all Board members.

Chairman Robinette agreed on the importance of an open exchange of information, and he asked if Board members felt that they are all well informed.

Commissioner Dillman felt that she does not know enough about Economic Development clients and expressed concern that only Chairman Robinette, County Manager Haynes, and Developer Rick Sago seem to have this information.

Chairman Robinette emphasized that confidentiality is imperative in working with clients.

Commissioner Dillman felt that the Economic Development Team is better informed than she is.

Chairman Robinette assured that the Board of Commissioners receives the same information as the Development Team.

Director of Development Rick Sago confirmed that the information that the Development Team receives is the same information that the Commissioners receive, and he too stressed that confidentiality is required. Mr. Sago referred to his monthly list of prospects and assured the Board that this information can be provided each month.

Commissioner Dillman stated that she would like to know the reasons that prospects give for not choosing to locate in Richmond County. Commissioner Dillman further stated that an exit interview is needed for companies that close and leave the County.

Commissioner Watkins advised that he understood the need for confidentiality in dealing with clients and that he had never been involved with prospect activity until the time of an announcement.

- 3) Use specific examples*

Animal Control and landfills were cited as specific examples of important issues. There was discussion of the Montgomery County recycling facility used by Richmond County and how citizens sometimes are not aware that the county's recycling requirements are met at the Uwharrie facility.

Commissioner Watkins noted the importance of planning ahead on disposal of the County's waste once the contract with the Montgomery County landfill facility has expired within the next 10 years.

Director of Community Services B. K. Jones confirmed that the County currently hauls 120 tons of waste per day at \$41.00 per ton to Montgomery County.

Commissioner Dillman made reference to the new landfill being proposed in South Carolina with the entrance road to the facility in Richmond County.

Chairman Robinette stated that the County has no jurisdiction in South Carolina, but if the entrance road to the proposed facility is in Richmond County, then the Board may want to consider a response.

The Board continued discussion of the proposed Marlboro County proposed landfill and the need for Richmond County to plan ahead for waste disposal. Commissioner Maske cautioned that the County would not want to alienate Marlboro County in the event that it became necessary later for Richmond County to contract for disposal of waste in this facility.

Commissioner Dillman stated her opposition to the regional landfill concept with multiple states using the facility.

Commissioner Garner warned that the State of North Carolina might try to offer a landfill site to the County as an industry if plans are not made now for disposal of the County's waste in the future.

It was consensus of the Board that Richmond County is in the best condition that it has been in the past 20 years.

4) Discuss undiscussable issues

Mr. Aycock mentioned the land transfer tax option made available for consideration by referendum in North Carolina counties, and he advised that the tax had not been approved in any N. C. county.

By consent, the Board recessed the meeting at 9:00 P.M. to reconvene at 8:00 A.M. on February 19, 2008 for breakfast, followed by a presentation by Richmond County Schools and North Carolina Southeast.

The meeting reconvened at 9:00 A.M. on February 19, 2008 following breakfast.

Discussion began with the topic Agri-Business, and Commissioner Dillman mentioned local crops, farmers markets, and the potential for co-ops and distribution centers to market local produce.

Chairman Robinette advised that he knows someone who is considering location of a major farmers market along the Hwy. 220 By-Pass at Exit 8. County Manager Haynes noted the change in traffic flow since the by-pass has been constructed and that markets would need to locate so as to take advantage of the new traffic patterns.

There was further discussion of marketing of farm products and of the need for infrastructure (sewer) to serve businesses that might locate along the by-pass. There was discussion of potential grant funding for such projects, possibly through the Golden Leaf Foundation.

Commissioner Dillman felt that tourism could be attracted to the area along with agri-business.

Commissioner Watkins noted that Cooperative Extension Service is working with local farmers on how to attract more tourism.

Commissioner Garner stated that tourism develops itself from natural assets and that we must have amenities to go along with tourism.

Mr. Sago advised that the Chamber is being asked to consider moving into the renovated historic depot building on Hwy. 74 where the Cole Foundation currently has an office and might possibly be willing to help accommodate this move. Mr. Sago felt that a more aggressive approach to tourism and marketing could be taken at that location. Chairman Robinette agreed and recommended that the Board perform the necessary role to promote tourism.

There was discussion of the City of Rockingham's plans for a recreational complex, and the Board concurred that contact should be made with the Tourism Authority for a preliminary timeline report to be provided.

Commissioner Garner emphasized that tourism is a business, and Mr. Sago reminded the Board that funds generated through motel room taxes and deposited as Tourism Authority funds are earmarked by the General Statutes to be used for tourism.

In further discussion of the Tourism Authority, Chairman Robinette recommended that a report and update from them be requested in the next 6 months. Mr. Sago advised that he anticipates that the Chamber Board should vote the next day on relocating the Chamber offices and Tourism Authority to the depot building.

There was discussion of the need for RCC to develop horticulture and fish farming programs.

Chairman Robinette and Vice-Chairman Garner mentioned the possibility of touring the facilities at RCC and perhaps scheduling a mid-month meeting there to see construction projects, etc.

Mr. Sago mentioned the Tech Prep Program and getting students interested in careers.

Facilitator Ron Aycok noted the importance of an on-going effort to tie together schools and Economic Development.

Commissioner Garner emphasized the importance of insuring that RCC remains a community college and not an alternative school.

At 10:00 A.M. Richmond County School Superintendent Dr. George Norris and School Finance Officer Pam Satterfield joined the meeting.

Chairman Robinette stressed that education is a huge component in Economic Development and is one of the first things that clients ask about.

Dr. Norris provided a handout of 180-day recommendations, advising that he had not yet made a formal presentation of this material.

Dr. Norris remarked that there have been no major changes in the schools since 1972 when Richmond Senior High was built. Dr. Norris noted that only one school system in the 115 school systems in North Carolina, other than Richmond County, includes 9th grade as part of junior high schools. McDowell County was noted as the only other school system with 9th grade level treated as part of Jr. High; all other systems are organized as grades K-5; 6-8; and 9-12. There was further discussion of the difficulty in transitioning from junior high to high school under the current system and difficult to offer equitable programs and experience in all schools. Dr. Norris offered a recommendation to establish a separate campus for 9th grade either at the Washington Street School or Richmond Primary. Dr. Norris indicated that there is adequate space to accommodate sixth graders at the junior high schools.

In further discussion, it was recommended in the Superintendent's recommendations that the Early College High School be maintained at RCC with the objective being to have students spend 5 years there and earn a 2-year degree. Commissioner Dillman asked what kind of students would be enrolled in this program, and Dr. Norris advised that these students are those that are typically not successful in the regular high school curriculum. Dr. Norris referred to these students as at-risk kids, and that the program is designed to provide every child with an opportunity to be successful and would help to reduce the drop-out rate.

Hoffman School was recommended as a site for continuation of 9th grade, and development of Middle College High School was recommended in collaboration with RCC in 2009-2010. This would be a rescue program in an attempt to get drop-out kids to graduate. Dr. Norris described Leak Street as a school for kids with discipline problems, and he recommended that this program be developed to target grades 9-12. In discussion of other recommendations, Dr. Norris recommended that the Chalk Road property be used as a site for a pre-K-5 school; and Dr. Norris recommended that in light of test scores and drop-out rates, only grade appropriate field trips be allowed during school hours.

In discussion of school bond funds, Dr. Norris stated that the Local Government Commission allows changes in projects for which the bond funds are used with permission of the Board of Commissioners. Dr. Norris advised that the requested change in use of the bond funds would be

to cancel the \$1.2 million project for Hoffman School, and instead to use these funds at a later date at Mineral Springs School, where the Hoffman students would later be housed. Commissioner Maske commended Dr. Norris for coming forward with new ideas and for his concern about the drop-out rate.

Chairman Robinette also commended Dr. Norris for his innovative ideas and forward-thinking. Chairman Robinette stressed that students have changed, and therefore the schools cannot continue to operate the same as always. Chairman Robinette further stated that much more technology is now available, and problems need to be sought out and people should be held responsible. Chairman Robinette committed to helping the schools by bringing in new jobs and new people, and he stressed the need to put kids and their opportunity for a good education first.

Dr. Norris discussed computer use at Rohanen, where “Smart Boards” are being used. The Superintendent explained that the Gates Foundation had awarded funds toward this kind of purchase for every classroom over the next few years. Dr. Norris remarked that the high school will become a different place within the next few years, and he hoped that advanced placement courses would be offered to provide the opportunity for students to earn college credits while in high school.

There was further discussion of the transition of 9th grade, and the Superintendent noted that this would not detract from the athletic program. Dr. Norris confirmed that 9th graders would have the opportunity to participate in senior high sports and that there would be 9th grade sports programs too.

Commissioner Dillman questioned Dr. Norris about his ideas on improving the drop-out rate, and the Superintendent advised that he has been a school superintendent for 20 years and worked with a company to develop this program. Dr. Norris went on to advise that he monitors every drop out, and that attendance and pattern of behavior are key factors.

In discussion of the 9th grade, Dr. Norris advised that of 115 school systems in North Carolina, 113 have a 9-12 grade program. Dr. Norris also noted that McDowell County is the only other school system that does not have a 9-12 program, but they are in the process of changing their system, making Richmond County the only county with a different system.

In further discussion of the high school, Commissioner Maske commended the dedication of RSHS Principal Cory Satterfield.

Commissioner Watkins also commended the changes and fresh ideas being recommended by Dr. Norris. Dr. Norris acknowledged that he did not expect this to be easy.

Commissioner Garner remarked that many of the children come from homes where parents have dropped out of society and let the child down. Dr. Norris acknowledged the need for a change in culture. Commissioner Garner agreed that principles need to change in order to effect change.

Commissioner Watkins commended Dr. Norris for making principals accountable.

Chairman Robinette thanked Dr. Norris and Mrs. Satterfield for coming, and he emphasized a unified effort to move the County forward with good and open dialogue with the schools and equal respect for one another.

Commissioner Dillman recommended that the Board visit schools during mid-month meetings.

Dr. Norris assured the Board that the schools want to maintain a good relationship with the County Manager and the Board of Commissioners and not expect anything unreasonable.

Dr. Norris and Mrs. Satterfield completed their presentation and left the meeting at 11:00 A.M.

Marketing Manager Steve Yost of North Carolina Southeast then joined the meeting for a comprehensive report and Power Point presentation.

Mr. Yost noted that N. C. Southeast is a partnership of 11 counties: Richmond, Scotland, Hoke, Cumberland, Sampson, Robeson, Bladen, Columbus, Pender, New Hanover, and Brunswick. Mr. Yost advised that the partnership has been in existence since 1994 with a strategy of marketing the entire region for business expansion and relocation.

Mr. Yost provided statistical data about the Southeast Region: since 1996, there have been 90 industry locations; 8,307 jobs created; \$661,125,000.00 invested in the region; region population of 1,058,000 with 10% growth since 2000; labor force of 482,179-approximately 20% in manufacturing; 5% unemployment rate; 2 regional airports in the region; good highway access; and 27 Fortune 500 companies located within the region.

Mr. Yost went on to advise that N. C. Southeast maintains a list of available industrial buildings and sites within the region, and he ranked Richmond County Industrial Park as one of the best in the region. Mr. Yost further noted that Richmond County is fortunate to have two certified sites: Rockingham Industrial Park-West and Richmond County Industrial Park.

In further discussion of the variety of industry sectors in the region, Mr. Yost noted that warehouse/distribution is one of the prime areas for development right now, and he stressed the importance of highway and port access as important factors.

In discussion of industry leads, Mr. Yost advised that the internet is very important, and he explained that N. C. Southeast makes it a priority to maintain and update their web site on a regular basis.

Mr. Yost discussed industry locations in the region, advising of a \$37,475,000.00 investment in the region.

Mr. Yost referred to the importance of port development and of the international port being planned for development in the Southport area on 600 acres.

Mr. Yost commended Director of Development Rick Sago on his proactive approach to economic development, and he encouraged Richmond County to continue what we are doing.

Chairman Robinette complimented Steve Yost on his work with N. C. Southeast, and he referred to Mr. Yost's prior work as Developer with Columbus County and with the Department of Commerce.

Mr. Yost commented on Richmond County's successful shell building program, and he cited voter approval of Economic Development Bonds as a key indicator of the County's commitment to Economic Development.

Commissioner Watkins commended the commitment by N. C. Southeast to market Richmond County even though the County is the county located on the farthest west end of the region.

Commissioner Maske acknowledged the County's success with the shell building program, and Mr. Yost noted that a shell building typically remains on the market for 2 to 4 years.

Chairman Robinette asked Mr. Yost to discuss the importance of confidentiality in recruiting industry. Mr. Yost stated that confidentiality is "Rule #1" in working with a company, and he cautioned that he has seen projects that were lost due to breach of confidentiality. Mr. Yost added that non-disclosure agreements are sometimes required by the prospective industry.

At 12:05 P.M. discussion concluded, and County Manager Haynes advised the board that the Aycock Group will compile a report for each Board member outlining goals and objectives.

County Manager Haynes added that a draft of the proposed sign ordinance as revised by the Planning Board would be brought to the Board for consideration on the next agenda. Chairman Robinette agreed that the ordinance should be considered during the next Regular Meeting when all Board members would hopefully be able to attend.

Commissioner Watkins commented on the Human Relations Council and the availability of diversity training offered through the Council.

By consensus, the meeting adjourned at 12:15 P.M.

*Marian S. Savage, CMC
Clerk to the Board of Commissioners*