

September 26, 2014

The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in a recessed session on Tuesday, September 26, 2014 at 11:00 AM in the Commissioners Room, 116 Adams Street, Plymouth, NC. Commissioners Johnson, Manning and Phelps were present. Also present were County Manager Jerry W. Rhodes, Clerk to the Board Julie J. Bennett, County Attorney Curtis Potter and Finance Officer Frank Milazi. Commissioners Sexton and Walker were unable to attend. Other staff in attendance: Rhonda Woolard (DSS Director), Sherri Wilkins (Tax Administrator), Darlene Fikes (IT Director) and Ann Keyes (Planning/Safety and EM Director).

Chair Johnson called the meeting to order. Ms. Lydian Altman and Ms. Maia Landey from the UNC-SOG were here to talk to the Board about strategic planning and how the UNC-SOG could assist.

Ms. Altman stated she was here to ask a lot of questions to see where the County is with strategic planning. Chair Johnson asked Ms. Altman if she has seen the County's 20 year plan. Ms. Altman said yes she has skimmed over the report from 2006. Chair Johnson said that the 2006 plan was more like a Christmas wish list; however, the County did have some items completed due to grants and stimulus funding, but with the economic decline in 2008 other items were unable to be completed.

Commissioner Phelps stated that he would like for a strategic plan to be more comprehensive, more than an economic plan with involvement of staff and the community. Commissioner Phelps felt that parts of the original plan could be used but a new plan needs to be broader.

Mr. Rhodes said he has shown the County's Commerce Building numerous times, but there is a water/sewer issue—the building has none. The County is addressing this issue (by applying for a water/sewer grant), however, when talking to prospective tenants they ask what type of presence community colleges have in the County for training. Washington County needs a strong foundation in the County before it can build up the County's workforce development. Ms. Altman asked what does the County think a successful strategic plan would look like. Mr. Rhodes said the community would be involved and key stakeholders—the County needs economic growth. The Board should have leadership to guide the plan. We are a super-rural County.

Mr. Milazi said the County needs to look and see what other Counties have done—they all had to start somewhere. Strategic planning means different things to different people. The County needs to have a good vision for future years and the community needs to be involved.

Commissioner Manning stated that he has read through the previous plan and was not sure how it was written—either by one person or many. It seemed like a wish list. When it was written the economy was a lot better. Commissioner Manning said he is not sure what a new strategic plan should look like. He is involved in agriculture, but even agriculture has changed in the last 20 years. The County has tried some things like building the shell building (the Commerce Building), but for some reason folks just don't want to come here to our County.

Jobs would solve a lot of our problems. Jobs would increase the tax base. Commissioner Manning feels that a strategic plan would need to be a little more realistic with a short term component.

Commissioner Phelps asked should the strategic plan be narrow or should it be broad. Does each department need to set goals?

Ms. Altman told the Board they need to look at what they have—what is the focus and how far out should that focus go? Who is involved will depend on the County's focus. Everyone has spoken about community involvement—that would be a broad focus. One benefit would be that community would feel they have a stake in the plan and that could give the County a great outcome. Ms. Altman suggested creating a 'governing' team and a 'worker' team.

Commissioner Manning said everyone can take the current plan and look at each item to see if it should be modified or deleted. Ms. Altman said the County needs to see how relevant the current plan still is.

Commissioner Phelps said he previously sent a copy of a blueprint for Bertie County to Ms. Altman. Ms. Altman asked Commissioner Phelps what he liked about that blueprint. Commissioner Phelps liked the citizen involvement in their blueprint. The blueprint was created by the Kenan Institute which Ms. Altman said the Kenan Institute would also be available to the County. They have more resources than UNC-SOG. Ms. Altman said she spoke with someone at the Kenan Institute and they said they would be willing to work with the County. The Kenan Institute also worked with Beaufort County at a cost of about \$5,000.

Commissioner Manning said he feels economic development is what will help our communities the most.

Ms. Altman said the County could consider having something larger that includes economic development. She feels that the Bertie document is a great resource. Enough has changed since 2006 that the Bertie document could be a good resource. Ms. Altman said the Board should plan for only 3–5 year with 3–5 goals.

Mr. Milazi said there should be a government vision, then a departmental vision.

Commissioner Phelps said he wants the community very involved. On a scale of 1–5, he says community involvement should be a 5.

Ms. Altman asked the Board to think about how much of the writing that staff would be able to do and execute the plan.

Ms. Altman said if the Board has a retreat (for 1 ½ days), it would be a good way to get together and throw out ideas. The Board and Department heads could develop the structure and talk about community involvement. Everyone could help create a mission, goals and priorities. Mix big topics and small topics. Ms. Altman said she doesn't need data before having a retreat. Ms. Altman can help give focus and framework for Board and staff as a good first step.

Commissioner Phelps asked Ms. Altman what is the next step for the County. Ms. Altman stated she could give the County a list of things to think about to create context.

Ms. Altman suggested that she can work with the Kenan Institute to help Washington County. Discussion ensued. A retreat with the Board and Department heads should be the first step. Ms. Altman said she would help create the agenda and be on-site during the retreat. She feels that the Board should start with a one day retreat. Ms. Altman said she would facilitate during the meeting. Everyone needs to get out of their normal setting and select a good venue. Ms. Altman she needs a date that would work for all Commissioners. The venue needs to have enough room for folks to move around in small group. Lunch should be provided on site (box lunch. The time should be from 9:00 am– 4:00 pm—possibly at the Vernon James Center. The Board stated that the November/December timeframe would suit them best. There will be no PowerPoint presentations, but Ms. Altman will need two (2) flip chart stands/easels and wall space. Ms. Bennett will assist with the logistics for the retreat.

**At 1:30 pm with no further business to discuss, Commissioner Manning made a motion to recess the meeting. Commissioner Phelps seconded, motion carried unanimously.**

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Tracey A. Johnson  
Chair

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Julie J. Bennett, CMC, NCCCC  
Clerk to the Board