

September 30, 2014

The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in a joint meeting with the Martin County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, September 30, 2014 at 7:00 PM at the Golden Skillet, 167 US Highway 64, Plymouth, NC. Washington County Commissioners Johnson, Manning, Phelps, Sexton and Walker 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. Martin County Commissioners Bowen, Smith, Lilley, Hyman and Bond were present. Also present were County Manager David Bone and Clerk to the Board Marion Thompson.

Other staff from Washington County included Ann Keyes (EM Director), John Flemming (EMS Director), Darlene Fikes (IT Director), Delisa Johnson (911 Director) Sheriff James Ross, Chief Deputy Beth Floyd, and Tim Esolen (Register of Deeds (formerly GIS/Mapping Director.))

Other staff from Martin County included Sheriff Dan Gibbs, Deputy Sheriff Tim Manning and Jason Steward (Communications Director).

Chair Bowen called the Martin County Commissioners meeting to order. Commissioner Bonds led the pledge of allegiance; Commissioner Smith gave the invocation. Chair Johnson called the recessed meeting of the Washington County Commissioners to order.

DISCUSSION CONCERNING POSSIBLE 911 CENTER CONSOLIDATION BETWEEN MARTIN AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES: David Bone spoke to both Boards. Jones and Lenoir consolidated their 911 Centers by obtaining a grant of \$7.4M from the NC 911 Center. These are the first two counties to consolidate. Their consolidated 911 Center opened in July of last year. Dare, Hyde and Tyrrell will be consolidating as well. Consolidation would build upon an existing relationship to improve 911 centers. Consolidating 911 Centers will allow offices to pool personnel resources, have a primary and secondary center and enhance the potential of 911 to the community. Also Counties could access NC 911 funding by being consolidated and that funding can be used for brick and mortar projects. Consolidation could help 911 Centers to maintain and improve services for both counties. Last year Martin County met with Bertie County to try and forge a similar arrangement. Martin and Bertie County have a regional jail together. An RFP was written to select a consultant to do a study on the feasibility of merging Martin and Bertie County's 911 Centers. Last year Bertie's Board decided not to move forward. By that time, RFPs had been received from 3 consultants. Mr. Bone stated he knows that Washington County is not at that stage tonight, but everyone is here to have conversations to see if this is feasible for Martin and Washington County. Mr. Bone also stated that Mr. Richard Taylor, Director of the 911 Board, is here tonight to speak also.

Mr. Rhodes reiterated what Mr. Bone said—both counties are here tonight to see what could be. This is just the beginning to see if Martin and Washington County want to move forward to have a study done.

Mr. Richard Taylor, Director of the NC 911 Board spoke to both Boards. Mr. Taylor said he knows that there are a lot of questions regarding funding, pitfalls, etc. of merging two 911

Centers. A lot of folks get scared. Mr. Taylor said the NC 911 Center is available to help the two counties figure out their wants and needs. Mr. Taylor said he travels from Murphy to Manteo and knows funding is tight all over. When Jones and Lenoir County made their move to consolidate, he worked with them. Just like here, the tax rate in those counties couldn't be raised. Mr. Taylor said he knows that consolidating can be tricky. There are a whole lot folks with a whole lot of wants. Questions arise such as: Who is going to be in charge? Fire Department, Sheriff's Department, Law Enforcement, EMS? How do you get everyone to work together? That's the first challenge.

**At 7:20 pm Commissioner Phelps made a motion to recess the Washington County Board of Commissions meeting for dinner. Commissioner Sexton seconded, motion carried unanimously. Also Commissioner Smith made a motion to recess the Martin County Board of Commissioners meeting for dinner. Commissioner Bonds seconded, motion carried unanimously.**

**At 7:35 pm Chairs Johnson and Bowen called the meeting back in session.**

Mr. Taylor said consolidation can be handled several different ways, possibly by a Board or whatever governance you choose. What works in one place, may not work in another. A consultant is usually one who can help with this. The consultant would make a recommendation and the two boards would make the decision. Commissioner Phelps asked how it would affect the number of buildings or the number of jobs. Mr. Taylor said usually most places are already shorthanded and everyone will be utilized rather than diminishing staff. By utilizing staff, 911 Centers can run two people per shift rather than one which is safer. People will not be cut out. There is a facilities advantage with grant monies because the funds can be used for anything to do with the consolidation. A new building may be needed to make the consolidation work. Jones and Lenoir Counties remodeled a Lenoir County facility and built a new facility (a fully functional backup center) in Jones County—so Jones County got a brand new facility. Chair Bowen asked about the turnover rate in 911 consolidated centers. Mr. Taylor said he couldn't answer that question since there is only one consolidated 911 Center at the present time, however, he did say that in non-consolidated 911 Centers the turnover rate is about 70—80% at the present time.

Commissioner Smith stated that right now resources are limited in both counties. Both Counties need to have to have a vision and a purpose—why would we consolidate? Commissioner Smith told both Boards that our counties don't usually get any help from Raleigh and this is an opportunity for that to change. Let's not put who is in charge on the table. Let's figure out why we need to do this first. Commissioner Smith asked to hear from the people that actually run things now in EMS, 911, Sheriff's office, etc. Ms. Keyes, EM Director for Washington County asked is there a chance of a virtual consolidation? Mr. Taylor replied that is a possibility. Mecklenburg County has implemented a virtual consolidation. There are 3 separate communication centers—located separately but connected virtually and they can interface with each other so they can act like they are in the same room but each still has their own identity. The down side is that they are still operating 3 separate centers. Mr. Taylor said that eventually every 911 system in NC will be connected. However, we are many years (about 9) away from that happening. To get there will take a lot of work such as updating and getting new equipment in every center. Discussion ensued. Jason Steward, Martin County Communications said virtualization is a good thing but really needs consolidation to have the bodies needed to get the job done and not be short-handed at any time.

Commissioner Smith stated he was concerned about the sustainability of the funding. Discussion ensued.

Tim Esolen, Washington County Register of Deeds, but formally GIS/Mapping Director asked would the GIS Director be mapping both counties together. Mr. Taylor said he thought each individual county would do their own mapping. Darlene Fikes, Washington County IT Director asked could they connect through a VPN tunnel. Mr. Taylor said he did think that would be possible.

Mr. Taylor said that grant money is money that is left over at the end of the year. It doesn't come from money set aside for 911. This is money not claimed by internet providers and 911 recovery fees. Mr. Taylor doesn't see the General Assembly increasing the 911 fund fee to increase monies to be used for grants. Also, the cost of equipment is also becoming outrageous.

Chair Johnson asked Mr. Bone what was the cost of having the study done when Martin County was going to partner with Bertie County in this process. Mr. Bone said the RFPs ranged from \$75,000–\$80,000 and \$120,000–\$150,000. Martin County has budgeted \$37,500 for having a study done. Chair Johnson stated that Washington County has not budgeted any money for a study in this year's budget.

Commissioner Phelps asked why Bertie County decided not to participate. Mr. Bone said he couldn't speak for Bertie County but felt that with their amount of employee turnovers and change orders with their new high school they didn't feel they had the funds for it. Mr. Bone said the RFP was done for the study with a consultant, but then Bertie pulled out and the study was not done.

Commissioner Manning stated he had talked to Tyrrell County about Washington County joining them with Hyde and Dare and they said it wouldn't benefit them for us to join them. Mr. Taylor said Tyrrell, Hyde and Dare would have to stop their project, redesign it and ask for more money—which wouldn't be of benefit to them at this point.

Commissioner Manning wondered about having Beaufort join Washington County. Mr. Taylor said he doesn't think that Beaufort County wants to do this.

Mr. Bone said there is an advantage to having the study done even if we don't move forward. Both Counties would still have a scorecard of both of our facilities and resources to make wise investments down the road.

Mr. Bone said he has been serving on the State's NC 911 Funding Board and said a situation came up where a project needed more money and NC911 granted them additional funding.

Commissioner Smith asked what the Washington County Board needs to be able to understand this better, to be able to make a decision. Commissioner Walker said he would like to see a study to see the savings. Commissioner Phelps agreed saying he needs to see the benefits of consolidation in writing. Chair Johnson asked were there any projections in the study to see where things are heading. Mr. Bone said the RFP can be written to that effect. Commissioner Phelps asked staff members who were in attendance what they would like to see

addressed in a study. Ms. Keyes said she has a concern that with consolidation employees would lose longevity. Mr. Bone said that could be worked out to everyone's benefit--this would be a governance decision to be evaluated. Mr. Flemming, EMS Director asked what would be the cost of updating the CAD systems. Mr. Taylor said it depends on who the CAD vendor is. Costs could range from an average of \$225,000 for a CAD System then there would also be a need for mobile devices such as IPADS which are more expensive/more durable.

Chair Johnson asked the Sheriff if he had any concerns. Sheriff Ross said the location of the building might cause an issue for some employees—the hardship of driving from here to Williamston or Jamesville—he would like that to be considered. More discussion ensued.

Mr. Bone reiterated that the Boards are not here tonight to make a decision, however, it does take 4 months to complete the study and the grant money won't be available indefinitely.

Chair Johnson asked for more information to look over to be able to discuss at the Washington County Board of Commissioners meeting in December.

Mr. Bone and Mr. Rhodes will work on an RFP to get a draft to Commissioners of both Boards.

Chief Deputy Floyd said Washington County has one records clerk for the County and our communicators are cross-trained to do other duties. Mr. Steward stated Martin County has two people to do gun permits and one to do protective orders. Chief Deputy Floyd said Washington County would have to look at adding staff if we do consolidate. Mr. Bone commented that all these issues would be brought up in the study.

Mr. Milazi asked Mr. Bone where the funds came from for the first study. Mr. Bone said he used Martin County's general fund not the 911 fund.

Mr. Rhodes stated that Washington County is already collaborating with other counties—there is a lot of collaboration going on. This is just an opportunity to add to those successes and take advantage of the money available.

Sheriff Gibbs noted that he is aware that Washington County is short-staffed and knows Washington County would need to hire additional staff with a consolidation.

Commissioner Manning thanked the Martin County Board of Commissioners for the invitation to try and work together saying that rural counties have to stick together.

**At 8:45 pm, with no further business to discuss, Commissioner Sexton made a motion to adjourn the recessed meeting of the Washington County Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Phelps seconded, motion carried unanimously.**

The Martin County Board of Commissioners completed another item of business before adjourning also.

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Tracey A. Johnson  
Chair

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