

April 7, 2025

The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in a regular meeting on Monday, April 7, 2025, at 6:00 PM in the Commissioners' Room, 116 Adams Street, Plymouth, NC. Commissioners Ann C. Keyes, Tracey A. Johnson, Carol V. Phelps, John C. Spruill and Julius Walker, Jr. were in attendance. Also, present were County Manager/ County Attorney Curtis S. Potter, Assistant County Manager, Jason Squires, Clerk to the Board Julie J. Bennett and County Finance Officer Missy Dixon.

Chair Phelps noted that there was an outstanding crowd here tonight. He was glad to see everyone. He let them know that public interaction is always welcome.

Chair Phelps called the meeting to order. Commissioner Spruill gave the invocation. Chair Phelps led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS: None.

Commissioner Spruill made a motion to approve tonight's Agenda. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Items listed under Consent are generally of a routine nature. The Board may take action to approve/disapprove all items in a single vote. Any item may be withheld from a general action, to be discussed and voted upon separately at the discretion of the Board.

- a) Regular Session Minutes: March 3, 2025 & Special Called Meeting Minutes: March 21, 2025
- b) Tax Refunds & Releases and Insolvent Accounts
- c) Proclamation 2025 – 004 Two Lights for Tomorrow
- d) Interlocal Agreement with Chowan & Gates for Feasibility Study Agreement for Regional Jail Facility
- e) Audit Contract
- f) Revised Pay Tables

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Spruill seconded; motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC FORUM: Mr. Jimmy Jones, 51 Cardinal Lane, said he is still here talking about Cardinal Lane and trying to get help to make it a State Road and have it paved. Mr. Jones said he needed another meeting (pointed at Ms. Keyes) because he has more information. Also, he is not happy with trash pickup; they are tearing up the road.

Mr. Jack Shutz, Cardinal Lane, also talked about Cardinal Lane and wanted it to be paved.

Commissioner Keyes said he was referring to her when she was EM/Planning and Safety Director.

BOARD OF EQUALIZATION AND REVIEW: Ms. Bennett, Clerk to Board swore in the Commissioners as the Board of Equalization and Review. Ms. Sherri Wilkins, Tax Administrator was unable to attend tonight; however, she asked Ms. Bennett to report to the Board that there are no appeals at this time.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to recess the Board of E&R to May 5, 2025, at 6:00 PM in the Commissioners' Room, 116 Adams Street. Commissioner Spruill seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING—VACANT SCHOOLS/DEPARTMENT RELOCATION: Mr. Kelly Chesson, ED Director spoke to the Board.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to open the public hearing. Commissioner Walker seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Kelly Chesson, ED Director went over the results of the community interest survey that he posted to Facebook. These results were given to the Commissioners in their package; however, Mr. Chesson went over them for the public.

Department Relocation: Assessment & Recommendations

The presentation evaluates the best relocation site for staff efficiency, community access, and long-term sustainability. Two sites were compared:

- **Plymouth High School (PHS)**
- **Washington County Middle School (WCMS)**

Key Factors & Findings

1. Accessibility & Public Engagement

- **PHS:** Located in Plymouth, close to businesses, hotels, and services.
- **WCMS:** Centrally located in the county, with better accessibility for seniors.
- **Conclusion:** Both sites are viable for public accessibility.

2. Security & Department Separation

- **WCMS:** Isolated location with independent entrances, easier department separation, potential for Sheriff & EMS substation.
- **PHS:** Higher crime concerns require added security measures.
- **Conclusion:** **WCMS is the better option for security and privacy.**

3. Senior Center & Community Programs

- **PHS:** Larger kitchen and cafeteria support **Meals on Wheels** but has accessibility challenges.
- **WCMS:** Easier entry and accessible bathrooms but farther from most senior participants.
- **Conclusion:** **WCMS is better for senior services, while PHS supports community engagement.**

4. Financial Costs & Long-Term Sustainability

- **PHS:** Requires costly renovations and has limited field availability for recreation.
- **WCMS:** Lower costs, easier renovations, and better long-term investment potential.

5. Final Recommendations

- **PHS:** Best for **indoor recreation and community events**, but costly to renovate.
- **WCMS:** Best for **health services, elections, senior center, and recreation**, with security, accessibility, and lower costs.
- Long-term, replacing PHS might be more cost-effective than renovating it.

Next Steps

- Public Hearing in April
- Board of Commissioners (BoC) Meeting site decision selection for consolidation

Mr. Earnell Purington, 276 Downing Road, Roper representing the non-profit WCU Alumni Association spoke to the Board. The Association was formed March 2, 1992 to keep the legacy of the school alive. It provides scholarships to high school students in the County. (over \$30K) They also make donations to the food pantry, DSS, and to WCS for student supplies. Their purpose is also to preserve accurate records of the school's history. They work to promote camaraderie between all students. They need to have a place for their Association to meet and plan for the future. They would like to purchase the Multi-Purpose Room on the site of Roper Union Middle School. It would serve as their headquarters.

Ms. Shamica Sanders, 12025 Hwy 32 N, Roper. She is President of SIMP, est. 2013, a non-profit organization that provides various camps for kids, etc. They need a facility to be a safe haven for the kids which are increasing in numbers. SIMP would like the old Roper Gym. They can possibly get grants to pay for it. She said the kids need a safe place to go. Commissioner Johnson asked Ms. Sanders if she was talking about the stand-alone gym. Ms. Saunders said yes.

Ms. Vanessa Joyner, 346 Roxie Reese Road, Plymouth, was here representing Meals on Wheels. She thinks Plymouth High School would be better for that since most of their homebound clients are in Plymouth. Volunteers are hard to get and they do not want to inconvenience them too much.

Ms. Renee' Collier, 154 Newland Road, Roper, Washington County Senior Center Director stated that various seniors asked her to convey that they would like the Senior Center closer to Roper making it centrally located.

Mr. Travis Spruill, 430 Monroe Street, Plymouth, works with Washington County's Recreation Department and said they can transition their programs to all three towns. Participation is growing in karate, pickle ball, and tee ball. There needs to be more done for the kids to keep them off the street. Commissioner Walker asked about the areas in which he is interested. Mr. Spruill said they need the PHS fields and maybe the Creswell field.

Ms. Paulique Horton, 992 St. Davids Road, Creswell spoke about the community as a whole. There needs to be after-school activities. They need to be trained for a good job. We need to empower our children. Our teachers need a place to stay. Kids need to be safe. Creswell schools do not need to be sold.

Ms. Joyce Holloway, Fairfield Road, Greenville and in Roper represents AGENC. They bring the arts to the community. AGENC would like WCU to be retained for community use and events.

Mr. Lloyd Jones, Jr., Roper, said he is concerned about election headquarters moving. He gave Dora Bell props for being the best Elections Director! He said the County should leave the Board of Elections in Roper.

Ms. Joy Davenport, 738 Old Cherry Rd., Creswell, likes the idea of our youth having somewhere to go and something to do. We need to create more recreation for the youth, not the adults. If we do not have something here, they will go to another town to participate. Also, we need to have security to keep them safe at recreation activities.

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Walker seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Potter spoke to the Board regarding the following memo he sent to the Board.

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS:

CAROL V. PHELPS, CHAIR
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JULIUS WALKER, JR.



POST OFFICE BOX 1007
PLYMOUTH, NORTH CAROLINA 27962
OFFICE (252) 793-5823

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF:

CURTIS S. POTTER, ICMA-CM
COUNTY MANAGER & COUNTY ATTORNEY
cpotter@washconc.org
JASON SQUIRES
ASSISTANT COUNTY MANAGER
acm@washconc.org
CATHERINE "MISSY" DIXON
FINANCE OFFICER
mdixon@washconc.org
JULIE J. BENNETT, MMC, NCMCC
CLERK TO THE BOARD
jbennett@washconc.org

AGENDA ITEM MEMO

MEMO Date:	April 6, 2025	MEETING Date:	April 7, 2025	ITEM:	4
SUBJECT:	Vacant Schools/Departmental Relocation – Roper Middle School Recommendation				
DEPARTMENT:	Management/Elections/Senior Center/Recreation/Facilities/etc.				
FROM:	Curtis S. Potter, County Manager / County Attorney				
ATTACHMENTS:	A- n/a				

PURPOSE: To recommend the Board select and approve the Roper Union Middle School site for relocation and ongoing use by certain county departments.

SUMMARY: The County and Washington County School System (WCS) previously entered into a PK12 school facility funding agreement which calls for WCS to convey certain vacant school facility sites to the County after they are vacated as a result of the student body consolidating into the new PK12 facility. Those sites include the: Washington County High School (WCHS); Roper Middle School (RMS); Roper Gym; Creswell Elementary (CES) and Creswell High (CHS), the latter of which is still presently used for ongoing early college operations, while all the others are currently vacant.

In anticipation of receiving the vacant school properties (which staff anticipated receiving via deed by the end of April, 2025), County staff has undertaken an extensive review and analysis regarding the possibility of repurposing one of the sites for relocating and combining certain County departments and services. WCHS and RMS were evaluated as the two primary candidate sites for such purpose. After carefully reviewing a wide variety of factors including:

- current and projected utilities, maintenance, and operational costs of existing facilities compared to the potential use of WCHS or RMS sites;
- individual departmental analysis and input, including potential interdepartmental operations and cross-usage of shared/common space;
- site specific location factors including facility layout and condition, renovation potential, external and internal security factors, geographic location, and target service population densities; and
- additional third-party and public input...

Staff recommends selecting the Roper Union Middle School site for its immediate and ongoing use by a variety of departments including the following:

- Elections (which strongly prefers Roper to Plymouth, and needs to be relocated by May 2025 to accommodate its own operations as well as the WC School System's request to obtain the BCCC WCC/Roper Annex facility for its use in 2025 to house the early college).
 - o Due to the fast approaching timetable, depending on relocation logistics, it may be necessary to temporarily relocate elections into the stand alone media center at the Roper Union Middle School site. However staff strongly recommends maintaining the general communal availability of the media center for common meeting room/activity purposes in the long term, and recommends moving elections into the main school building as quickly as possible if it could not otherwise be initially relocated there for logistical reasons.
- Senior Center (which prefers Roper to Plymouth)
 - o Larger kitchen and common rooms with more space for indoor and outdoor activities.
- Recreation (which prefers the Plymouth Gym to the Roper Gym, but can go ahead and establish a secondary/auxiliary location at the Roper site while maintaining primary operations in Plymouth)
 - o This will enable the partial co-location of the Senior Center and some Recreation Programs during the first year of the intended merger of those two departments.
 - o This will also enable the county to greatly expand its pickle ball and other senior activities programming as requested by multiple citizens in recent years.
 - Staff anticipates continuing to pursue the possible relocation of Plymouth based recreation programs from the older Adams St. Gym to the newer and larger WCHS Gym if/when the utilities of that facility can be separated from the other surrounding facilities.
 - o This also enables various non-profits the possibility of continuing to utilize certain RMS space such as the auditorium and/or media center to hold various community programs during the year.
- Additional Ancillary or Longer Term Potential Uses:
 - o EMS and/or Sheriff's Office for a dedicated sub-station, office space, or storage space as needed to assist with the operations of both agencies.
 - o Secure Storage for various departments with limited or contracted storage options currently (Finance, Tax, IT, Maintenance, EM, etc)
 - o Planning & Zoning Office with larger more appropriate meeting/storage space.
 - o Community library/media room
 - o Outdoor recreation/community walking/exercise trail
 - o MTW – Longer term if there is ample space available and MTW leadership determined it to be in MTW's best interests, we would also entertain the potential mutually beneficial relocation of some/all MTW operations to this site.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS: A precise estimate of future maintenance/repair and utility expenses is impossible to accurately calculate at this point, and will largely depend upon the final eventual usage of the overall site by multiple departments. Based on a preliminary review of the state of the RMS facilities and their historical utility costs compared with several known facility and utility costs of currently utilized sites that would no longer be incurred (such as the BCCC WCC and Senior Center sites) if relocated to the RMS site; staff anticipates that after a short term light renovation investment in the facility (predominantly to bring bathrooms up to adult standards and address certain security needs) and potentially a longer term investment in upgrading the lighting to more efficient LEDs, the long term benefits/savings will could eventually outweigh the initial short term costs. That is particularly true if a third primary department such as MTW were relocated onto the site with elections and the senior center. Additionally the initial departments selected for relocation to this site are prime candidates for

generating additional grant revenues with which to potential carry out some of the renovations and/or improvements of the RMS site for the County's benefit.

Ultimately due to the size of the facility, initial utility costs may be higher than anticipated, particularly before efficiency upgrades to older lighting and ac/heating controls are made. Careful control of utility settings and monitoring of utility costs is advised and staff suggests setting up separate budget line items to account for and track the short and long term maintenance, renovation, and repair costs as well as utility costs for each separate site within the County's chart of accounts. Monitoring the overall cost/benefits of the relocation to this site closely over time will be critical to fully analyzing the net benefits to be potentially realized from doing so.

Without efficiency upgrades, staff currently estimates the overall utilities cost for utilizing the RMS site for just relocating elections and the senior center alone is likely to be as much as double that of their currently estimated \$37,500 annual utility costs incurred from their present facilities. Keep in mind however, the current senior center facility (smaller than the proposed space it would occupy at the RMS site) is already outdated and known to be in need of extensive renovations. One additional potential benefit for utilizing the larger RMS site rather than multiple smaller sites is realizing increased efficiency savings and lower maintenance costs from economies of scale. Staff anticipates that the more of the site that can be utilized in place of, rather than in addition to, existing sites throughout the county, the closer the short term cost/benefit analysis will come to resulting in a net gain for the county and over time the faster that the long term break-even for all associated costs will result in a similar net gain for the county.

Further review and analysis by the Finance Department and Facilities Committee with regard to potential realistically anticipated utilities costs is already underway and is recommended to be included within a strategic renovation and relocation plan prior to facilitating any permanent relocation of any of the departments described above (except for the initial relocation of the elections office due to timeline constraints and the ability to temporarily segregate the operations of that one office within one small self-contained portion of the overall site).

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. VOTE to select the Roper Middle School site as the primary location for staff to continue assessing and planning for a potential re-purposing and renovation of this site for the potential relocation of multiple departments into this site, and authorize staff to facilitate the immediate relocation of the elections office to this site in coordination with the Elections Director and local board of elections in order to vacate the BCCC WCC/Roper Annex building currently utilized as the elections offices.
2. Direct staff to work together with Beaufort County Community College and WCS to prepare an MOU for the eventual takeover and use of the BCCC WCC/Roper Annex building by WCS for its use as an early college by WCS while maintaining its ongoing use as a community college site.
3. Direct staff to continue reviewing and assessing any and all available options pertaining to the future use of the remaining vacant properties, with particular emphasis given toward any viable options for the fair market sale of such properties or for their use in conjunction with viable economic development and/or affordable housing projects.

Mr. Potter said that staff is asking that the Board take action tonight on choosing the Roper Middle School site to move forward with moving Elections now and continue to look at PHS. Elections may be housed in the Multi-Purpose Building temporarily due to logistical hurdles now and move into the main building at a later time. Space is being requested by others to use that room also.

Commissioner Spruill said that if at all possible, find the space for Elections inside the school rather than move them two times.

Commissioner Johnson talked about the need to have a place for drive-up voting for citizens with disabilities.

Commissioner Spruill made a motion to utilize the Roper Union Main School (not the Multi-Purpose Building). Commissioner Walker seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING— ZONING ORDINANCE--CORRIDOR COMMERCIAL DISTRICT AMENDMENT: Mr. Allen Pittman, Planning/Safety spoke to the Board.

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to open the public hearing. Commissioner Spruill seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Pittman, Planning/Safety Director said he is bringing forth a text amendment for the Board's approval. This is an opportunity for change.

Statement of Compatibility with Existing Planning Requirements

An application for rezoning was submitted on January 2, 2025. This was brought before the Planning Board, and a hearing was set for February 20, 2025. Due to anticipated adverse weather conditions, the Planning Board, via phone conference, tabled and continued the hearing to be held on March 20, 2025 at 1:00pm at the Washington County Commissioners Room. Notices were posted on the door of the BCCC Roper Annex, and the Washington County Manager's Office on February 18,

Subject property is a certain tract containing shown and delineated as 31.28 acres, more or less, on a plat of survey entitled "Gary K. Haraguchi (Trustee) The GARY K. HARAGUCHI SEPARATE PROPERTY LIVING TRUST U/A DATED January 12, 2017" dated February 16, 2024 prepared by Timothy Esolen, Professional Land Surveyor, a copy of which is recorded in Map Cabinet 3, Slide 80-C, in the Office of the Register of Deeds of Washington County.

References for the initial hearing by the Planning Board are found in the Washington County Zoning Ordinance Article 4: Zoning Amendments; Article 3: Zoning Districts; NC G.S. 160D Article 6: Development Regulation.

Article 3B: C-C District Corridor Commercial District

- A. Purpose and Intent: The Corridor Commercial District provides for the establishment of land use techniques and regulations regarding suitable locations along the County's heavily traveled routes where commercial development may occur. These guidelines are intended for those commercial areas on routes oriented to vehicle traffic requiring major access, including interchanges on the planned US Route 64. Best management practices and storm water management shall be included in planned developments. Fees and/or costs associated with testing, surveying, and design shall be the responsibility of the individual, builder, or developer. It is the intent of this district to offer options to developers and/or owners of tracts lying within the district as well as to infill parcels at selected locations to provide for commercial uses and subsequent on-site parking and pedestrian traffic, public water and sewer, public street frontage, safe access, storm drainage, storm water management facilities, outdoor lighting, high quality site planning and landscape design. Developments are encouraged in areas where existing public water and sewer exist or it is feasible to extend public water and sewer systems. This district encourages reduction to driveway access to public roads. This district does not allow for domestic wells and septic systems for commercial developments.

This application was previously submitted on July 30, 2024, and denied due to having no available sewer, and no approval through Washington County Environmental Health to build a suitable alternative. Since that time, the land has been assessed and approved, using soil reports provided by the owner.

A text amendment is proposed to Article 3B: C-C District Corridor Commercial Retail District to add section G which addresses the ability to develop in areas where special engineering design for foundations and onsite wastewater management will ensure environmental protection, public health

and regulatory compliance. A hearing on this matter was held on March 20, 2025 by the Planning Board, and a recommendation to adopt the amendment has been forwarded to the Board of Commissioners.

It is the recommendation of Planning Department staff that this application for rezoning from R-A to C-C be approved, providing the Text amendment to Article 3B:C-C District Corridor Commercial Retail District is adopted by the Board of Commissioners .

Mr. Pittman said it is the recommendation of the Washington County Planning Board that the Washington County Board of Commissioners adopt the revision of Article 3.B: Corridor commercial District to include new language in Section G. of the Zoning Ordinance to include areas where no public sewer is available, and the changes to the Special Use and Allowed Uses listed.

Commissioner Keyes noted that Mr. Mitchell Patrick was in the audience (our county sewer expert). Mr. Patrick had no comment.

Commissioner Spruill asked Mr. Pittman to thank the Planning Board for their efforts in trying to move the County forward.

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Spruill seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Potter discussed the following Ordinance ORD-066, An Ordinance of the Washington County Board of Commissioners Approving a Text Amendment to Article 3(B) (Corridor Commercial District) of the Washington County Zoning Ordinance. *[A signed copy is attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference.]*

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to approve ORD-066 as presented above. Commissioner Keyes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING— REQUEST FOR CHANGE IN ZONING CLASSIFICATION: Mr. Allen Pittman, Planning/Safety spoke to the Board.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to open the public hearing. Commissioner Spruill seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Pittman noted that this request was contingent on the approval of the previous Ordinance. There were no questions based on what was in their Agenda package.

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Spruill seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Potter discussed Ordinance, ORD-067, Ordinance to Amend the Official Zoning Map of Washington County to Rezone a Portion of Parcel 687.00-49-3872 South-East of the Intersection of US64 and NC 45. *[A signed copy is attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference.]*

Commissioner Spruill made a motion to approve ORD-067 as presented. Commissioner Keyes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

BOARDS & COMMITTEES: Ms. Julie J. Bennett, Clerk to the Board, spoke to the Board about the following.

TRAVEL & TOURISM AUTHORITY BOARD

Mr. Lou Manring has recently resigned from the TTA board. The TTA Board met Tuesday, March 25, 2025 and unanimously voted to have Mr. Mark Pardue replace Mr. Manring. Mr. Pardue is the curator of the Roanoke River Maritime Museum and serves on several boards, including the Museum of the Albemarle. He also serves on the America 250th Committee and the county's new Economic Development Council. As such, he will make a valuable member of the TTA board.

The TTA Board is requesting the Commissioners' approval of the TTA's nomination of Mr. Mark Pardue.

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to appoint Mr. Mark Pardue to the Travel & Tourism Authority Board. Commissioner Spruill seconded; motion carried unanimously.

FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT: Ms. Dixon went over the budget transfers and budget amendments that were in the Commissioners' package.

Commissioner Spruill asked for an explanation of BA#2025-091. Mr. Potter said this is the difference between 2 attorneys--himself and Mr. Bardill, our foreclosure attorney. His contract needs to be pre-audited by the Finance Officer. Commissioner Spruill asked if funds are allocated out of the general fund. Ms. Dixon said yes and no one can draw from that account without her or Ms. Dunlow's (Deputy Finance Officer) signature.

Commissioner Spruill asked about fund 10-3270-000 Occupancy Tax. Why is that \$0? Ms. Dixon said it is a one-time a year entry at the end of the year that goes to the TTA (according to GASBY standards). You will see it in Fund 63. She will book backwards into the General Fund at the end of the fiscal year.

Commissioner Spruill made a motion to approve the budget transfers/amendments 2025-82 to 2025-92 as presented. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

OTHER ITEMS BY COMMISSIONERS OR STAFF:

Mr. Potter said the County will open bids tomorrow on the Pea Ridge Water Main project and on the elevator project for the courthouse later this month. Staff is working on a wide array of capital projects. He is preparing the budget that will be presented at the Board of Commissioners' Meeting on May 5, 2025.

Commissioner Johnson noted that the NCACC District 1 Meeting will be in June in Camden County. She also said she spoke at a Rural Summit on BEAD (broadband in rural

counties). Commissioner Johnson stated that Mr. Reginald Speight now works with the Dept. of Commerce.

Commissioner Walker said he appreciated the comments from the citizens tonight.

Commissioner Keyes said the same. She also said she has had an NCACC virtual meeting since our last Board meeting and attended many other meetings in and around the county.

Commissioner Spruill participated in a ZOOM call from folks in our mountains and they talked of their devastation. Counties are bankrupt. He asked everyone to keep them in their prayers. It will be many years before they can rebuild.

Chair Phelps thanked everyone for participating in the BBQ dinner in the Creswell area and in the ball games. He heard there were about 400 folks in town.

Commissioner Spruill made a motion to go into Closed Session pursuant to NCGS§143-318.11(a)(3) (attorney-client privilege) and NCGS §143-318.11(a)(6) (personnel). Commissioner Walker seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Keyes made a motion to come out of Closed Session. Commissioner Spruill seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Spruill asked for update on EMTOC. Mr. Squires said Mr. Potter has the contract on his desk. Everything is moving along. A groundbreaking may be no more than 2 months out.

Mr. Potter said he was told the General Assembly was going to pass a bare-bones budget before Good Friday. When they come back after Easter, they will add items back into their budget.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Keyes seconded; motion carried unanimously.

Julie J. Bennett, NCMCC, MMC
Clerk to the Board

Carol V. Phelps
Chair