

**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
CONTINUED SESSION
JUNE 5, 2018
MINUTES**

Chairman Tate reconvened the meeting at 3:05 p.m. in the commission boardroom as recessed from the May 15, 2018 continued session. All board members (with the exception of Commissioner Gillespie, who joined the meeting later), the County Manager, Deputy Clerk, Finance Director, County Attorney, members of the news media and a number of county department heads were present.

Chairman Tate started by noting that the board members have had some time to digest the County Manager's recommended budget, and that the board would meet with the members of the Macon County Board of Education at 5 p.m. He also pointed out that Commissioner Gillespie was on a work-related emergency and would be at the meeting as soon as possible.

With no set agenda, Chairman Tate led off on the discussion of the budget, saying that he would like to see aesthetic improvements to the county's recycling convenience centers. The County Manager said the budget contains \$300,000 for this. Commissioner Higdon asked to make sure that Nantahala was on the list and also asked that any safety issues be identified. In terms of special appropriations, Chairman Tate said that he would like an update on the State of Franklin agency. He said he would defer discussion on the expansion of South Macon Elementary School until Commissioner Gillespie arrived. Meanwhile, he addressed the issue of the "hit" that county employees took regarding an increase in health insurance coverage in a year that no cost of living adjustment (COLA) was planned. "As a leader, I don't feel great about it," he said, adding that employees are being asked to "make a severe decision" about facing taking "an extra \$200 out of their paycheck to keep insurance at the same level." From that, he said he had three thoughts: (1) ask the County Manager to look at revenues to afford either a COLA or to pay the insurance increase, (2) potentially fund the difference in the health insurance for this year, or (3) how to handle a COLA increase. This led to a lengthy discussion. (NOTE: Commissioner Gillespie joined the meeting at 3:31 p.m.) A number of options were presented, but after further discussion, the consensus of the board members was to let the County Manager address it. No action was taken.

In terms of the budget schedule, the board will hold its regular meeting on June 12th and then recess and hold a continued session on June 19th at 6 p.m., at which time the public hearing on the budget will be held, and after which, the board could vote to adopt the budget for Fiscal Year 2018-19.

Following discussion, the board members agreed to postpone any discussion of school funding until 5 p.m. when all of the school board members could be in attendance.

At 3:50 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session for the purpose of preserving the attorney-client privilege under NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3). Upon a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Gillespie, the board voted unanimously to come out of closed session and return to open session at 4:43 p.m. No action was taken.

Chairman Tate called the meeting back to order at 4:58 p.m. Speaking to what had become a boardroom nearly filled to capacity, he noted that everyone present had "a dire interest in education." Explaining that the board's liaisons to the school system, Commissioners Beale and Shields, had met with their counterparts from the Board of Education, Chairman Tate handed the discussion off to Commissioner Beale. In turn, Commissioner Beale asked Macon County School Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin to come to the podium, and a discussion ensued regarding a projected shortfall of almost \$500,000 in the system's budget for the coming year, even with \$200,000 in additional funding included in the County Manager's recommended budget. Dr. Baldwin then went over a list of potential cuts that would reduce the shortfall to approximately \$40,000, noting that the school board members have not approved his suggested reductions. Commissioner Beale then said, "I think it's also time we make the school system whole in their funding." Following more discussion, he said that he and Commissioner Shields were requesting \$500,000 in additional operating expense money for the system, as well as a \$250,000 increase in capital outlay to be earmarked to address safety and security issues. He also asked that the county and school system staff members work together to "crunch the numbers," with the County Manager to bring a recommendation back to the commissioners. This led to a discussion regarding information technology funding for the school system. Fred Goldsmith, a Board of Education member, told the commissioners that when teachers don't have enough digital textbooks, they are forced to copy and hand out the material on paper, which prompts another budget hardship. Commissioner Higdon expressed that he did not know what "make whole" means, noting that he had been inundated with e-mails recently stating that the commissioners didn't fully support education. He pointed out that the county still owes about \$30-million in debt on school buildings, that Macon is

one of only four counties in the state that has a School Resource Officer (SRO) in every school, and that the county funds the Molar Roller dental vehicle as well as school nurses. "We do support education," he told the group. Commissioner Gillespie said that prior boards should be commended for the serious commitments they made to school infrastructure, but added his belief that "we are not funding our kids to be prepared to come back into the Macon County workforce" and that the commissioners needed to "look at the big picture of where we are going with education" and figure out how to fund it. Commissioner Tate reminded the group of the public comment period available to each of them at the board's upcoming regular meeting on June 12th. He also mentioned that the public hearing on the budget would be held on June 19th at 6 p.m. He said, "Our county budget is as tight as a banjo string," but later added that he felt confident that the recommendations from the two liaisons would go through.

With no other business, and upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to adjourn at 6:12 p.m.

Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

Jim Tate
Board Chairman