POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Budget Work Session

May 19, 2025 - 1:00 PM

Bryant H. Womack Justice & Administration Building
40 Courthouse Street
Columbus, NC 28722

MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Yoder, Vice-Chairman Moore, Commissioner Beiler, Commissioner Melton, and Commissioner Hargett. Also present were County Manager Pittman, Clerk to the Board Freeman, Media and Citizens.

ABSENT: Attorney Berg.

1. Call to Order the Regular Meeting - Chairman Yoder.

2. Scheduled Departments

   A. Public Schools - Aaron Greene, Superintendent Polk County Schools.
      - **Education Public Schools (10-5910)**

   Aaron Greene, Superintendent of Polk County Schools, addressed the Board of Commissioners and said that 86% of the school system's funding is allocated to personnel costs and that yearly expenses aren't typically determined until September or October and are based on the previous year's data. He said that the school system is expected to be $400,000 short in the upcoming year, so they are asking for an increase to prevent future problems like the need to eliminate positions. He said that if they could get an increase this year, then they could avoid asking for a bigger increase in the following years.

   B. Harmon Field - Jim Fatland, Tryon Town Manager.

   Mr. Fatland explained that the devastation from Hurricane Helene resulted in the loss of multiple facilities at Harmon Field. He said that the Harmon Field Board of Supervisors and the Tryon Town Council had been working with FEMA to address the destruction and recovery. Since some of the facilities that were destroyed were a key source of revenue, Mr. Fatland requested $50,000 in additional funding to help support their operation as repairs are being made. After consideration, the Board of Commissioners reached a consensus to grant Harmon Field an additional $45,000 in funding instead of the $50,000 that was requested.

   C. Sheriff's Department - Sheriff Wright
      - **Sheriff (10-4310)**
      - **School Resource Officers (10-4311)**
      - **Jail (10-4320)**
      - **911 Communications (10-4325)**
      - **Animal Control (10-4340)**

Sheriff Wright reviewed all the departments that he is responsible for and requested no change to the recommended budget.

D. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) - Michael Crater.
   - **EMS (10-4370)**

Michael Crater, EMS Director, addressed the Board of Commissioners and requested no changes to the recommended budget. He did explain that as Polk County continues to grow in population, EMS personnel will also need to be increased.

E. Fire and Rescue Advisory Committee (FRAC) - Bobby Arledge, Emergency Management Director, and Fire Marshal.

Mr. Arledge explained that due to the financial strain caused by Hurricane Helene and the Black Cove Complex Fires, the Fire Department budgets have been significantly impacted. As a result, the Fire and Rescue Advisory Committee is requesting funding increases to support personnel and salaries. Manager Pittman clarified that on page 8 of his Budget Message under Volunteer Fire Departments, the Columbus Fire Department initially recommended an additional $136,500. However, upon review, Mr. Arledge discovered that the Town of Columbus' portion had been mistakenly included in the county's figure, leading to a miscalculation. He further stated that FRAC unanimously approved and recommended the following budget increases:

- Tryon Fire Department: additional $55,000
- Columbus Fire Department: additional $77,000
- Green Creek Fire Department: additional $99,000
- Saluda Fire Department: additional $42,500

The Mill Spring and Sunny View Fire Departments are not requesting any increases this year.

F. Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) - Joshua Kennedy.
   - **Transportation Operations (20-4520)**
   - **Transportation Administration (20-4521)**
   - **Health Department (20-5110)**
   - **Drug Free Community (20-5115)**
   - **Senior Services (20-5169)**
   - **Department of Social Services (DSS) (20-5300)**
   - **Veterans Services (20-5820)**

Joshua Kennedy, HHSA Director, addressed the Board of Commissioners and requested no changes to the recommended budget.

3. Revenue Neutral Property Tax Rate Discussion

   Manager Pittman said that after discussions with Tax Administrator, Melissa O'Loughlin, the county remains on course with its original tax plan. He reiterated that the revenue-neutral rate is still .4142, and the recommended rate is still .4342, which included a two-cent increase for Polk County Schools and the new YMCA facility. He said that updates would be provided regarding any adjustments as the Equalization and Review Board concludes its tax appeal hearings.

4. Adjournment

   Commissioner Melton moved to adjourn the Budget Work Session, seconded by Commissioner Beiler, and the motion carried unanimously.

Attest:

Kennedy E Freeman
Clerk to the Board

Polk County Board of Commissioners

Myron Yoder
Chairman