POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
Budget Work Session
May 18, 2026 - 1:00 PM
Bryant H. Womack Justice & Administration Building
40 Courthouse Street Columbus, NC 28722
MINUTES

Present: Chairman Yoder, Vice-Chairman Moore, Commissioner Beiler, and Commissioner Hargett. Also in attendance were Manager Pittman, Clerk to the Board Freeman, and citizens.

Absent: Commissioner Melton

1. Call to Order the Budget Work Session - Chairman Yoder

2. Regular Agenda Items

   A. Isothermal Community College - Margaret Annunziata, President.

   Ms. Annunziata discussed the development of a new Heavy Equipment Operations program, which will incorporate simulation-based training and employer partnerships. She said that no new equipment purchases are planned, as participating employers will provide the necessary equipment for training purposes.

   The proposed budget includes a 7.5% increase in operational funding, consisting primarily of a 3% salary increase for employees and approximately 4% for building repairs and maintenance.

   B. Public Schools - Todd Murphy, Superintendent Polk County Schools.
   - Education - Public Schools (10-5910)

   Mr. Murphy said the schools are requesting a one-time $1 million allocation to the school system's fund balance. He explained that the requested allocation would provide the school system with additional flexibility while awaiting final legislative budget decisions and evaluating future funding needs.

   He also explained that approximately 80% of the school system's budget is dedicated to personnel costs and said that rising expenses, including insurance and retirement contributions, continue to impact operations. He emphasized the importance of maintaining small class sizes, which are valued by parents and contribute to student success.

C. Planning and Zoning Department — Cathy Ruth
- Planning (10-4910)
- Economic Development (10-5913)

Ms. Ruth presented a proposed update to the Planning and Zoning fee schedule, which would increase text/map amendment fees by approximately $100 to $500. The revised fee structure is intended to better reflect the actual costs associated with development applications, including advertising expenses that are currently covered by the County. She also discussed an additional fee of $10 which will be required to notify adjacent property owners to cover the cost of certified mail.

D. Building Inspections - Patrick Rimer
- Building Inspections (10-4350)

Mr. Rimer said they are requesting an update to the Building Inspections fee schedule. He explained that fees have not been changed in 18 years. The proposed adjustments would bring the County's fees more in line with those charged by neighboring counties and better reflect current service costs.

E. Solid Waste — Travis Ballard
- Landfill (51-4720)

Mr. Ballard presented a request for rate increases within the Solid Waste Department. The proposal includes a $3 per ton increase for waste shipping to account for Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustments, as well as a $10 increase for annual permit fees. He explained that the annual permit program currently results in an estimated loss of approximately $400,000 per year, with 1,796 permit holders currently utilizing the service.

He said that the proposed fee adjustments are intended to help offset operational expenses and improve cost recovery within the department.

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

Mr. Arledge attended the meeting on behalf of the Fire Rescue Advisory Committee (FRAC) to present recommendations regarding fire district tax rates. He said that both the Saluda and Tryon Fire Departments requested increases to support staffing and personnel needs, as well as the replacement of aging equipment.

Mr. Arledge explained that the Tryon Fire Department was recently placed on probation by the State Fire Marshal's Office due to a shortage of on-call personnel. He said Tryon originally requested a $0.04 tax increase, but FRAC recommended a $0.02 increase, raising the district tax rate from 0.1038 to 0.1238. He explained that the additional funding would help with personnel recruitment and retention, as well as equipment needs. He also said that Saluda requested a $0.0075 cent increase in their tax rate from 0.1250 to 0.1325.

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

Sheriff Wright explained that they would like to add an additional position within the 911 Communications Department. The position is intended to increase staffing levels from two to three personnel per shift, which will improve operational coverage and the department's ability to respond to communications needs.

H. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) — Michael Crater
- EMS (10-4370)

Mr. Crater discussed ongoing ambulance replacement and maintenance needs. He said that for the upcoming fiscal year, EMS plans to remount an existing ambulance box onto a new chassis as an alternative to purchasing a completely new vehicle.

I. Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) — Robin Elliot
- **Transportation Operations (20-4520)**
- **Transportation Administration (20-4521)**
- **Health Department (20-5110)**
- **Senior Services (20-5169)**
- **Department of Social Services (DSS) (20-5300)**
- **Veterans Services (20-5820)**

Ms. Elliott explained that several budget projections remain dependent upon the adoption of the legislative budget. She said the department continues to experience revenue reductions resulting from changes in state and federal funding sources, which has led to uncertainty in future funding levels and program support

3. Adjournment

Attest:

POLK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Kennedy E Freeman
Clerk to the Board

Myron Yoder
Chairman