

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE ALAMANCE COUNTY BOARD
OF COMMISSIONERS FOR ALAMANCE COUNTY**

**June 3, 2024, 6:30 PM
Alamance County Historic Courthouse
1 SE Court Square
Graham, NC 27253**

Board Members Present: Chairman John Paisley Jr
Commissioner William "Bill" T. Lashley
Commissioner Pamela Thompson
Commissioner Craig Turner

Board Members Absent: Vice-Chair Steve Carter

CALL TO ORDER - CHAIRMAN PAISLEY

INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE - CHAIRMAN PAISLEY

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Moved by: Commissioner Lashley
Seconded by: Commissioner Turner

APPROVED UNANIMOUS

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Henry Vines, a Snow Camp resident, welcomed Commissioner Lashley back. He said he did not understand why the Board had not voted to take the extra money on the bond premium. Mr. Vines commented that the Board had already approved \$19 million. He asked the Board to reconsider adding "Commissioners' Responses" back to the agenda right after the public comments. Mr. Vines said it was not fair to make citizens wait until the end of the meeting to hear a response to their comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by: Commissioner Lashley
Seconded by: Commissioner Turner

Copland Fabrics - National Register of Historic Places Nomination

Approval of nomination to have Copland Fabrics considered for the National Register of Historic Places.

Resolution Approving the Conveyance of Surplus Vehicles to the Haw River Police Department - ACSO

Approval of a resolution approving the conveyance of two surplus vehicles to the Haw River Police Department; a copy of that resolution is set forth hereafter.

TAX REFUNDS

Tax Refunds, Releases, and Exemptions May 2024

Approval of tax refunds and releases; a copy of the tax refunds are set forth hereafter.

PUBLIC HEARING

Public Hearing FY2024-2025 Manager's Recommended Budget

Commissioner Lashley, seconded by Commissioner Turner, moved to open the public hearing. The motion carried without opposition.

The following speakers were heard:

Ed Priola, a Mebane resident, spoke about increased expenditures in county government. He questioned why every evaluated employee received merit pay. He suggested returning to the 2% merit pay levels and restricting merit pay to the top 25% of performing employees.

Gabriel Strickland, an Alamance Virtual School (AVS) student, advocated for funding the school system.

Lillith Stewart, an AVS student, advocated for funding to keep all 38 schools in ABSS open.

Chris Smith, an ABSS parent, asked the Board to adopt a budget to strengthen ABSS.

Emersyn Campbell, an AVS student, advocated for the Board to fully fund ABSS's budget request.

Louisa Dang, an ABSS parent, said her daughter informed her they would not have a librarian at their school. She mentioned another incident where the gym roof leaked due to heavy rain. She asked the Board to work with the Board of Education to place a school bond on the ballot in 2025.

Matthew Dobson, an AVS Parent Teacher Organization representative, shared that he wanted to offer a different perspective. He said the virtual school benefited the overall budget due to its lack of physical assets. He further stated that it was 30% more cost-effective than the traditional brick-and-mortar school. Mr. Dobson said it was an alternative for students looking for a virtual environment. He reported that the virtual school met and exceeded its performance growth areas.

Theresa Draughn, an ABSS Substitute/ABSS parent, urged the Board to apply for the Renew Schools Prize Grant by June 13th and issue a resolution against vouchers.

Barbara Crook, a Burlington resident, said she had not realized how bad things were in the school system. She said she was appalled that the schools were in that situation. She asked the Board to fund Dr. Harrison's budget request fully.

Deborah Smith, a Burlington resident, spoke that she supported the ABSS staff and wanted the buildings to be safe. She asked the Board to apply for the Renew Schools Prize Grant.

Colleen King, an ABSS Parent, expressed concerns about the school's lack of funding. She encouraged the Board to apply for the Renew Schools Prize Grant.

Lily Mikkelsen, an ABSS student, spoke that her school was "falling apart" due to recent budget cuts to performing arts.

Camille Mikkelsen, an ABSS parent, spoke as a former teacher who would not teach in ABSS. She explained that she would have sought employment in one of the neighboring districts. She argued that they should not have to choose between a theater teacher at an elementary school or a virtual school that provides an alternative setting for students. She urged the Board to fight against vouchers and fully fund ABSS.

Ebony Pinnix, an ABSS parent, asked the Board to apply for the Renew Schools Prize funding or commit to funding a study of the school buildings. She said the students deserved better.

Peter Morcombe, a Graham resident, spoke about continuously throwing money at the school system for years when they have only worsened by objective measurements from the Department of Public Instruction. He said that more creative management was needed in the school system.

Medora Burke-Scoll, an Alamance-Burlington Association of Educators (ABAE) representative, expressed her disappointment as a taxpayer in comments made at the last meeting that dragged down public schools. She asked that they not play politics with the students and that the school system cuts only hurt the students. She urged the Board to fund the schools.

Dan Ingle, an ABSS Board of Education Member, said Alamance County was no longer small. He mentioned Sheriff Johnson's presentation about the county's growth and insisted that this county had many needs. He also spoke about education and the critical roles of educators. Mr. Ingle asked the Board to fund ABSS's budget request.

Henry Vines, a Snow Camp resident, said the budget presented was an increase, not a decrease. He expressed concerns about the continued use of fund balance to help balance the budget. He asked the Board to reconsider the quarter-cent sales tax referendum.

Sammy Moser, a Burlington resident, recognized Commissioner Lashley for his return. He commended the students who came out to speak at the public hearing. He thought it was important to let the students know that if taxes were raised too much, they would pay higher taxes as they graduated. He encouraged the Board not to raise taxes too much yet ensure the school system's funding was adequately spent.

Sandy Ellington-Graves, ABSS Board of Education Chair, acknowledged the cuts that ABSS had already made that impacted numerous positions and programs across the district. She spoke on the low tax rate and the growth of the county's population. She noted that Alamance County ranked 51st in the state for per-pupil spending while ABSS was the 14th largest school district. Ms. Graves emphasized the importance of education and advocating for students and staff as they continued to work collaboratively with the County Commissioners.

Jennifer Gauze spoke on a topic not related to the budget.

No other speakers wished to be heard. Commissioner Turner, seconded by Commissioner Lashley, moved to close the public hearing. The motion carried without opposition.

County Attorney Stevens addressed the calls by many of the speakers for the Board to apply for the US Department of Energy's "Renew America's School Prize." He said that after some quick research, the speakers were correct about the application deadline of June 13th. However, according to the website outlining the application process, the "LEA" is the local educational agency, and the school system must apply for that grant.

COUNTY ATTORNEY'S REPORT

County Attorney Stevens reported

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORT

No report given.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Thompson said the political party did not matter because she worked for everyone and would try to help. She thanked all of the speakers for coming out. She mentioned the program they had at church for the graduates. She shared some statistics on school nurse positions. Commissioner Thompson reiterated her feelings about the conditions of the school buildings. She said they must commit to doing right by the students and teachers. She spoke about the growth of the county and the increase in services. She encouraged the Board to do what was right for the students.

Commissioner Lashley asked if anyone in the audience knew the county's responsibility for funding school systems. He noted many things that were not the county's responsibility were mentioned during the public hearing. County Manager York read the general statute about school funding by counties. Commissioner Lashley said the virtual school was a great idea and questioned why ABSS had not included it in their budget. He commented that he had received some information that 581 students would no longer attend ABSS and had chosen other options. He did mention comments by Mr. Vines about continuing to use the fund balance. He thanked the students for coming to speak and being part of the public hearing process.

Commissioner Turner said this was his fourth year on the Board on the budget, and each year it seemed the budget became harder and harder. He continued that costs were going up, inflation was going up, and sales tax revenues were not going up like they had. He thought it would be a flat year. Commissioner Turner noted that the Medicaid hold-harmless payments from the state were still impacting revenues. He said this was a harder budget with work to be done. He thanked the students and everyone who came out and spoke.

Chairman Paisley said he was impressed with the AVS students for speaking at the meeting. He continued that the county had fully funded the school system every year, but had not voted on the budget yet. He said the county had provided funding and set aside funding for projects and contracts had not been entered. He encouraged the parents to talk with the Board of Education because the County Commissioners could not make ABSS do anything. Chairman Paisley agreed with Commissioner Lashley on the negative impacts of using the county fund balance and the percentage decrease in the fund balance.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Turner, seconded by Commissioner Lashley, moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

There being no further business to be brought before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 8:27 P.M.

John Paisley, Jr., Chairman

Alamance County Board of Commissioners

Tory M. Frink, Clerk to the Board