

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

**June 9, 2025, 9:30 AM
Agriculture Building Auditorium
209 N. Graham-Hopedale Rd
Burlington, NC 27217**

Board Members Present: Chairman John Paisley Jr
Vice-Chair Steve Carter
Commissioner Pamela Thompson
Commissioner Ed Priola
Commissioner Kelly Allen

Call to Order - Chairman Paisley

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance - Commissioner Allen

Budget Worksession Introduction - County Manager York

County Manager York said she was asked to address some of the slides in Commissioner Priola's PowerPoint presentation at the June 2nd meeting. She clarified information by explaining the total appropriations and the impact of external funding sources on county spending.

Commissioner Priola responded to County Manager York's characterization of a 16% increase in personnel by offering information on county tax liens and delinquent notices. He continued that the median lien amount was \$455.00 and the average lien was \$690.00. He said those liens represented widespread household distress in the county. Commissioner Priola emphasized that for many households on fixed incomes, property taxes were a real financial burden that had to be minimized.

Fire District Tax Rate Increase Requests

A.O. Fire Department - Chief Lipscomb requested a 2-cent tax increase. This would generate an additional \$166,000 in revenues. He said that part of those funds would be used to redo the fire department's parking lot over the next two years. He described the increased costs of fire equipment and the almost \$20,000 needed to outfit each fireman. He mentioned that his department had to replace turnout gear every 10 years. Chief Lipscomb advised that he planned to add another part-time position if the request was approved in the budget. Chief Lipscomb

mentioned paying off a truck that had a 10-year loan. He expressed that emergency services should be the last service anyone should cut.

E.M. Holt Fire Department - Captain Luke Macon requested a 3-cent tax increase, which would generate an additional \$385,894.36. He explained that his tax increase request was due to the growing fire district. He said his district expanded from the Guilford County line to Huffman Mill Road. He commented that he was looking at expanding staffing. He described how they had sold 10 acres of donated land unsuitable for a new substation. Captain Macon said they sold the land to build a new fire station headquarters. He said the old station would become a substation. He estimated the new building cost around \$4.3 million, with an annual payment of \$270,000-\$300,000.

Elon Fire Department - Chief Landon Massey requested a 1.35 cent tax increase, which would generate an additional \$58,922.09 in revenues. He continued that his department had focused on staffing over the last 5 years by adding 3 full-time positions. He noted that no fire department in this county was adequately staffed, so they all worked together. Chief Massey discussed some of the expenses his department had incurred: refurbished an old fire truck for \$300,000, replaced a ladder truck for \$2 million, spent \$400,000 on new radios, and purchased ballistic vests for \$25,000. He noted the Town of Elon funded those purchases. He reported that his department had responded to over 2,031 calls and that 405 were in their primary county district. Chief Massey said the county tax district only funded 11% of their budget at a 20% call volume. He continued that he planned to hire 2 full-time staff, and replace a 2001 F-250 truck with a brand new F-150 truck.

Faucette Fire Department - Chief Jimmy Westbrook requested a 1-cent tax increase, which would generate an additional \$80,414.11. He explained that the increased revenues would be used for fire turnout gear, operational costs, pagers, and the hiring of a part-time position to help staff the station on weekdays. He mentioned the new fire truck was purchased with a monthly payment of \$7,520. Chief Westbrook said that was almost \$87,000 a year. He noted that part-time salaries were increasing by \$16,000 for a total of \$70,000 for part-time staff. He said the increase was to help recruit and ensure they had people during the week.

Northeast Alamance Fire Department - Captain Jacob Littell requested a 1.7-cent tax increase, which would generate an additional \$125,269.44. He explained that his department did not currently have any full-time staff. He continued that his department was looking to hire a full-time 8:00 am -5:00 pm position to handle daily duties, paperwork, and records. In addition to this position, they would hire three full-time shift staff members to help them have 24/7 coverage. Captain Littell mentioned the fire station was built in 1962. The fire station had the original kitchen, bathrooms, and septic system. They planned to allocate \$100,000 for septic system repairs, renovations of the kitchen, bathrooms, sleeping quarters, and the purchase of a brush truck for their substation.

Snow Camp Fire Department - Chief Jerry Boone requested a 1.27-cent tax increase, which would generate an additional \$111,478.09. He continued that his department was in the county's southwest corner and covered 8 square miles. He explained that the requested increase was to hire an additional 24-hour person. Chief Boone said there was only one 24-hour person that worked by themselves.

Alamance Community College

Dr. Ken Ingle, President of Alamance Community College (ACC) said he appreciated County Manager York and her staff. He continued by saying that a lot of great things were going on at ACC. He noted the public safety training center was about to open, and that would be an additional \$250,000 cost for operating that center. Dr. Ingle mentioned that due to a flat budget, ACC will need to incorporate other funding sources. He said the increase in this past fiscal year helped support the college's needs. He commented that ACC was on track to spend 100% of those funds. Dr. Ingle thanked the Board for their continued support.

Alamance-Burlington School System

Dr. Aaron Fleming, Superintendent of ABSS, provided information on ABSS's budget request. He started off by reviewing the operational budget request for \$59 million, which was an increase of \$5.7 million compared to previous fiscal years. He emphasized that he had heard from many community members about the proposed reduction of \$10 million from the current expense budget. He acknowledged the Board's challenges in balancing budget priorities. Dr. Fleming voiced that he was there to advocate for the restoration of the operating budget and defend the \$5.7 million requested increase. He advised that if the \$10 million reduction remained, it would have immediate and significant negative impacts on the students and staff. He detailed that the teacher supplement would either remain frozen or be reduced. Dr. Fleming stressed that it would directly impact the school system's ability to attract and retain the best educators for the students. He continued that other critical areas, such as athletics, supplemental funding for Pre-K programs, cultural arts, and the district's ability to provide the local effort match for the state's low-wealth teacher supplement, would be severely impacted. He noted that the proposal to allocate additional school resource officer (SRO) funding above the current expenditure to the Sheriff's Office would affect the essential SRO positions within the municipalities. He asked the Board to consider the disparities in per-pupil funding for traditional public and charter schools.

Dr. Fleming said the \$5.7 million expansion funding included state-mandated increases to employee benefits, a supplement for certified and classified employees. The supplement allowed the school system to remain competitive with surrounding counties. Funding for operational expenses included increases in utilities and property insurance, charter school allocations, and additional certified staff. Dr. Fleming expressed that the school system was aware of the condition of the school facilities and had been transparent about the system's needs. In response, he said they had developed a responsible, long-term plan to address them. He stated this was not

about asking for more than they needed, but what they needed to provide a quality education for nearly 23,000 students. He mentioned that ABSS operated 38 schools with over 3,000 staff members.

Commissioner Priola mentioned the transparency around ABSS's dashboard was good, but too little, too late. He realized Dr. Fleming was new, but he reiterated that transparency was needed in their audits. He said he would like to see the dollars attributed to performance achievement. Dr. Fleming responded that he could not speak about the past, but was trying to move the school system forward. He mentioned that he had started transparency portals in other school districts. Dr. Fleming acknowledged that ABSS had a lot of academic work to do. He commented that a new assistant superintendent of academics was set to start soon. He confirmed that the school system was in the process of undergoing its new audit and that it will be presented to the state on time.

Commissioner Thompson referred to the public hearing speakers who had come out and had asked to have their taxes raised to fund the school system fully. She said she did not want ABSS on the news due to a lack of SROs; she noted that much damage could be done in as little as 15 minutes. Commissioner Thompson voiced that teachers had taken the financial hit every year. She commented that she supported ABSS's request because of the band-aids year after year. She said you must have a solid school system if you want a solid county. She noted that when you have to play catch-up, it just costs even more. Commissioner Thompson said the buildings needed to be up to par.

Commissioner Allen shared that while she volunteered at Haw River Elementary School, having an SRO front and welcoming students deterred any problems. She referenced what had happened at Sandy Hook Elementary School and the casualties a gunman could cause rather quickly. Commissioner Allen said she had only voted for one tax increase as a member of the Haw River Council. Haw River had gone 10 years with no tax increases, which caused the town to get further and further behind.

Vice-Chair Carter said the low-wealth funding issue had gotten the Board's attention. He indicated they did not want to be responsible for creating a problem that magnified itself. He had questions about reimbursements and transferring funds for charter school students. Dr. Fleming answered that the money followed the student. The school system was losing funding to charter schools, and they needed to find a gap or a pillow of funds to pass that on. Dr. Fleming indicated that if the SRO funding stayed with the county to pay the Sheriff's Office and did not flow through ABSS, the school system could not capture that in their per-pupil funding.

Chairman Paisley offered that it would be fairer to the SROs, the county, and the taxpayers to take the funds from ABSS and pay them straight to the Sheriff's Office.

Tony Messer, ABSS Chief Financial Officer, said Rebecca Crawford, Budget and Management Services Director, had the best explanation on how low-wealth funding worked in North

Carolina. He said it was driven by three components: property valuations, effective tax rate comparisons to other North Carolina counties, and how much counties were funding school districts on a per-pupil basis. Mr. Messer mentioned that counties that could not generate enough funds compared to other districts and counties were considered low wealth. He indicated that Alamance County's tax rate was below the state average, and the per-pupil funding was below the state average.

Chairman Paisley clarified that the school system was asking the county to fund the cost of adding additional personnel and questioned the reasoning. Dr. Fleming responded that those positions were cut before his arrival. The positions were counselors, student support positions, graduation coaches, media coordinators, and interventionist instructional coaches. He indicated that those positions were covered by the local government beyond the state allotments.

Sandy Ellington-Graves, Board of Education Chair, said Dr. Fleming and Mr. Messer did a great job explaining and clarifying ABSS's budget request. She said that when they discussed numbers, they should think about the students, teachers, and classified staff behind those numbers. She commented that the county was thriving, and the school system should be, too. Ms. Graves felt the school system had not asked for anything above and beyond what was needed. She said the Board of Education was committed to working with the County Commissioner to give the county what it needed in public education.

Follow-up Questions for the County Budget Team - Rebecca Crawford

Chairman Paisley announced that he had asked County Attorney Stevens to draft two resolutions. He continued that one of the resolutions would ask the state to cover all teachers' salaries. There would be no additional funding from the county, and the rate would be uniform statewide. County Attorney Stevens wanted to clarify the intent and ensure that others understood. He said the resolution would be sent to the state delegation asking them to work on modifying the law with the intent that there be pay parity across the state for teachers, and not allow for local supplements. County Attorney Stevens referred back to Chairman Paisley to describe the second resolution. Chairman Paisley explained that state money given to the school system, if not expended by June 30, would be returned to the state per statute. He said that if ABSS did not spend the county money by June 30th, ABSS would keep those funds. The county had no way of recovering those funds. Chairman Paisley opined that if the funds were not expended within the fiscal year, they should be returned to the county.

County Attorney Stevens advised that his research on General Statute 115C-546.2 did not reveal a mechanism for reverting funding to the state. He indicated there were several off-ramps for schools to continue spending funds beyond the fiscal year, and there was no requirement to return funds to the state. County Attorney Stevens said that Ms. Evans informed him there was a practical reason for the lack of reversion to the general fund for state school funds. He mentioned that schools operated on a reimbursable basis with the state, so they would never have more in their account than they would have to use.

Commissioner Allen asked County Attorney Stevens if there was a resolution or some way to ask the legislators about the quarter-cent sales tax. She said a quarter-cent sales tax would generate an estimated \$8 million for the county and benefit the other local municipalities. County Attorney Stevens answered that the only process he was familiar with was the local bond referendum. He advised the Board that if they wanted to put that on the ballot, it could be done as early as the 2026 primary election. The Board would not have to wait until the general election of 2026.

Proposed Changes to the Recommended Budget

Commissioner Priola said he had presented staff with seven questions to calculate the manager's proposed budget. Due to time constraints, he suggested that he review those interrogatories and discuss them in greater detail the following day. County Manager York responded that staff had a list of questions, including Commissioner Priola's, for discussion the following day. She said staff would need to gather the responses tomorrow.

Commissioner Thompson spoke that she did not favor a budget with all the proposed cuts. She supported a budget that would provide the school system with what it needed, as well as funding for the library system and other agencies that were at risk of cuts. Commissioner Thompson indicated there was much more work to be done because she would not cut the rescue squad. County Manager York asked the Board to inform staff of any other proposed adjustments they could factor into their calculations. She said they could show the impact on the tax rate based on the calculations.

Commissioner Allen believed there was a solution to give those funds back to the rescue squad.

Vice-Chair Carter spoke that it was important to remember the funding that the airport received from the county and the City of Burlington. The airport used those funds to offset the required local grant matches, thereby improving and expanding the airport property. He stated that the airport was a significant economic generator for the county. Vice-Chair Carter emphasized that the county had always supported the airport, and he had no intention of voting to reduce funding for the airport or the rescue squad.

Adjournment

Commissioner Allen, seconded by Vice-Chair Carter, moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried.

There being no further business to be brought before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 12:46 PM.

John Paisley, Chairman

Alamance County Board of Commissioners

Tory M. Frink, Clerk to the Board