

Thursday, April 29, 2021
Police Force Committee

The Beaufort County Police Force Committee met on April 29, 2021, at 6:00 PM, in boardroom located in the Financial Services Building located at 136 W. 2nd Street in Washington, NC with the following present:

Committee Members:

Chairman Hood Richardson
Commissioner Stan Deatherage
Commissioner Randy Walker

Staff Present:

Brain Alligood, County Manager
Katie Mosher, Clerk to the Board

Chairman Richardson called the meeting to order.

Commissioner Deatherage led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Walker offered the prayer.

Chairman Richardson said the next item is to approve the agenda. He said for the public's information we are streaming tonight so people will be able to see you live and what you're saying firsthand.

Commissioner Deatherage said considering we are streaming tonight is there any way possible we can ask our fine technical assistant to try and get some head shots on us and any members of the public that wish to speak. He said especially the public who wishes to speak. He said I can put that in the form of a motion if you desire.

Commissioner Walker said that's a great idea Commissioner Walker. He said being in the business I would love to see tighter shots on people speaking because you need to see what people's actions are. He said almost as important as what they're saying is how they say it.

Commissioner Deatherage said if you can see the person speaking you know that's the person speaking otherwise, at times, it's difficult to tell who's speaking.

Chairman Richardson said so the motion is to request the person doing the filming to focus on the person who is speaking, up close.

Commissioner Walker said right.

Commissioner Deatherage said if that would be the pleasure of the group.

Chairman Richardson said Mr. Manager is that going to be a problem.

Mr. Alligood said I think she can hear you in the back and will be able to do that.

Chairman Richardson said all right, so she can do that.

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

Motion: Commissioner Deatherage motioned to have the person filming focus on the person who is speaking. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Richardson said the next item is to approve the agenda. He said I think I was interrupted when we started that. He said you've looked at the agenda, do I have a motion to approve the agenda.

Motion: Commissioner Deatherage motioned to approve the agenda. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Richardson said the next is approval of the minutes from the March meeting and folks those minutes are extensive. He said I've got about, I don't know, 15 pages of minutes so do I hear a motion to approve on the minutes.

Motion: Commissioner Deatherage motioned to approve the minutes. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Richardson said we'll go ahead to the public comments section of this meeting. He said just to review, each person will have three minutes to state their case, there will not be an exchange between the committee and the individual who is stating their case and you cannot do a personal attack or a political attack on an individual as a part of your three minutes. He said we need to stick with the issue that we're here for deliberations on. He said the first speaker is Barbara Gaskins.

Ms. Barbara Gaskins said good evening Commissioners. She said we are all seeing what's going on with these recent events that are going on. She said Elizabeth City is one to just name a few. She said we have issues in Kinston. She said all of these rural areas are having issues regarding our police so therefore it's very important that we, as a community, work together with our police. She said if our police are not going to help in the way that they should then they need to be voted out. She said I come to you all tonight to ask for a County Police Task Force. She said this current Sheriff's Department, you know, we are having issues. She said Mr. Pie for instance. She said in August of last year an African American 71-year-old man was manhandled at the trash site on Magnolia School Road. She said the circumstances of which, someone called a sheriff via a cell phone. She said stuff like this should not happen. She said even on down to in the 70's with Ms. Joanne Little who was being raped in the jail by the jailers. She said these Sheriff's, they have a duty, they have a civic duty and this Sheriff, in particular, is not upholding his duty so once again I'm asking for you Commissioners to move forward.

Chairman Richardson said the next speaker is Ms. Carolyn Garris and just to be sure you are the chairman of the Beaufort County republican Party.

Ms. Carolyn Garris yes sir I am. She said thank you for allowing me to speak. She said I've been doing a lot of research since this committee was formed and I'm sure you know the history of the Sheriff's Department and how it was formed. She said while researching I ran across a very interesting article from 2011. She said at that time they were having an issue with their Sheriff that went out on extended leave. She said there was an interim director of Public Policy Institute at Western Carolina University, Todd Collins. She said I'm sighting him because I'm using his words. She said the origin of the system for autonomy for Sheriff's originated, as we know, centuries ago in England. She said there were fears that law enforcement would be merely an arm of the King and do the Kings will rather than what was in the interest of justice. She said the idea was to make a more independent office so Sheriffs could carry out their jobs even if they were pressured by local officials. She said you can imagine the problems that could occur if a Sheriff had to arrest a County Commissioner, but the Sheriff could also be fired by the Commissioner. She said article 3 of the of the North Carolina Constitution makes Sheriffs only beholden to the voters. She said they can act independently of other county offices. She said it would take an amendment to change this, as we all know, and if the voters did want to change the question then becomes, what system do you want to put in place. She said would you want them appointed by County

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

Commissioners. She said in North Carolina we do that with police chiefs in cities that can be removed by the town government, but that system could also create problems. She said the current system has strengths and I understand that it has some weaknesses too. She said we all have to be fair minded, but could you imagine the problems if the Sheriff has to investigate local leaders yet he or she is also beholden to those leaders. She said our current system makes the Sheriff directly accountable to the people, the voters, rather than elected officials. She said the reason I'm sharing this is because in this climate that we are experiencing we need more protection and not less, especially in our rural communities. She said with that I close and thank you for listening.

Ms. Patricia Garrison said I've spoken on this issue before, and I still feel very strongly that the mandate of this task force is to investigate what best serves the citizens of Beaufort County. She said if the Sheriff's Office, as it currently functions, provides an ultimatum, or the ultimate police protection and law enforcement in the County then let's investigate this and let that be heard by the people. She let the task force find those facts and present those facts to the citizens of Beaufort County. She said if during this investigation this task force, or this committee finds that there is an alternate form of law enforcement that best serves the people of Beaufort County then we need that information and let the citizens get that information, gather that information through town halls, for example, where we have open dialogue, open communication and then I would present that the citizens of Beaufort County be the ones to vote, present a referendum and vote on the form of law enforcement that they feel would best serve us at this time.

Chairman Richardson said that concludes the list of people who have signed up however it's not limited to the people who have signed up. He said is there any person in the room who wishes to make a statement.

Mr. Gary Blunt said I am former law enforcement for 14 years. He said I agree with this committee. He said when I was a sheriff deputy we always worried that after election time we may not have a job. He said this committee would solve that problem and all deputies, or whatever they would be called if it changes, would be guaranteed to keep their jobs. He said it would go from being political to just serving the people of the county so I'm in full agreement with this. He said but I agree with Ms. Garrison, I would like further details and what the citizens of Beaufort County are going to gain by going to a new County Police Force but I'm still in agreement with it.

Chairman Richardson said is there anyone else in the room who desires to speak.

No one spoke.

Chairman Richardson asked if the Commissioners had any comments.

Commissioner Deatherage said I'm going to stress something, just a couple of things. He said I thank Ms. Garrison for mentioning the obvious, this is a fact-finding committee. He said we're just doing some leg work now to find what is best for Beaufort County. He said we may fail in our endeavor, but it is important that we at least try so as we struggle to find out what could be the very best alternative for Beaufort County's public safety future we'll keep everyone's comments in mind. He said I would like to stress one other thing, we're not getting rid of the Sheriff, if in effect we do decide to have another level of policing in Beaufort County. He said the Sheriff would still be able to, at his discretion, investigate local officials as a duly sworn officer of the state. He said he would have free reign and he'd have more time to do it as well. He said I just thought I would stress that.

Commissioner Walker said I thought that was a really good idea Mr. Blunt, I hadn't thought about that as a positive to this. He said I wanted to make a comment on that. He said that's a really good point about job security.

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

Chairman Richardson said the other point is, that Commissioner Deatherage alluded to is we'll still have a Sheriff. He said the Sheriff will still have his Constitutional duties. He said he'll have almost all of his statutory duties and that includes whatever he needs to do to pursue his job as the Sheriff in Beaufort County. He said some people think we're trying to eliminate the Sheriff and do away with the Sheriff, no, we're not trying to do that. He said the constitution says the Sheriff has certain duties and among that is run the jail, serve warrants and to provide the bailiffs for the court system. He said there are other duties he has, some of which we'll get into later on in this particular meeting but we're not trying to eliminate the Sheriff. He said we're trying to level the police enforcement that Beaufort County deserves to have with a thoroughly competent and professional force, and it is a really big deal that these deputies or policemen, or whatever we decide to call them, have job security in Beaufort County. He said being able to carry on a department over years and years with accumulated information, accumulated skills, set procedures of how people are supposed to behave is important. He said right now, under the present system of the Sheriff, it can change tomorrow. He said it can certainly change when you elect a new Sheriff but those things can change tomorrow and we've had deputies, since I've been a Commissioner, that have been fired for virtually no reason whatsoever and they can be fired for that reason and job security certainly is an important thing and if you stop and think about what that means., from the standpoint of presenting evidence to grand juries and favoritism, that deputy has no choice but to do what the Sheriff directs him to do on any particular case. He said but a police department, with the Chief working for the County Manager, the County Manager working for the Board of Commissioners, a review board if there are complaints, a standard policy manual that is written, the ability of any citizen in the County to make an appeal, not just to one person like you do now but to about 11 different people. He said there's seven Commissioners, a Manager, to the police chief and the three-member board certainly broadens the ability to find justice in Beaufort County. He said the Sheriff is still going to be here when this is over with so we're definitely trying to eliminate the Sheriff in any way. He said he will still be an elected official. He said the constitution provides for that, just like it provides for a method of running county government with county commissioners, the house, the senate, and other things so we're not trying to change the state constitution at all. He said are there any more comments from the members of the Board.

No one asked to speak.

Chairman Richardson said we will move on to comments from judicial and municipal officials. He said we have one official who has come tonight. He said show me your hands if you are a judicial or elected official who has come here to speak under this particular part of the program. He said because if you are you have been invited so we have Cliff Williams, Mayor of Aurora and with that Mr. Williams, if you will come up to the podium, we're ready to hear your comments.

Mayor Cliff Williams said I appreciate you all inviting me, and I may run over the three minutes if that's okay. He said our Sheriff is an elected official, as well as we are, and we all have jobs to do. He said obviously you all have some problems with Sheriff Coleman, I don't. He said he's been very good helping out the Town of Aurora because we can't afford to have a police officer. He said he's kept two police officers rotating back and forth and we keep close communication with one another, and I think he's done an outstanding job for us and whenever we call him he's come through. He said I understand, and I've learned some other things tonight as well, but I have talked to other counties about their Sheriff's departments and a Sheriff has a lot more authority than a police force has. He said let's say that we put a policeman in your school system, somebody comes in and shoots up your school, he can't leave that property to pursue the guy that just got through with killing your children. He said a Sheriff's Officer can. He said there's other incidents that I could talk about, but these are the things I have concerns about, why do we have to have two. He said we're trying to manage our money, our budget, how is it we can afford to pay for, the schools can afford to pay for school protection but yet we can't afford to fund the Sheriff's Office. He said obviously there's some conflict here and I think we need to work these conflicts out. He said we're all trying to accomplish the same thing, the protection of the people of Beaufort County. He said let's say you have a gun, you believe in protecting yourself and all of a sudden, with the new administration, they say we're going to take your gun. He said I talked to Pamlico County and said what

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

does your sheriff say, and they said don't worry about it. He said nobody is going to come to this county and take your gun. He said for that reason you've got to be able to protect yourself because if you can't do it who's going to. He said I've been a police commissioner myself for eight years. He said I only had two officers but trust me, I have seen it all, but I had video cameras on my police officers, and you wouldn't believe the stories I had people tell when they would come in. He said let me give you one example. He said a woman, we get a call from Nutrien. He said a woman had left the plant, she had stolen something, they called the police, they stopped her in front of what used to be the elementary school. He said they got her out of the car and frisked her. He said she was screaming that they had mishandled her, said that she was going to, they tried to do other things and all that. He said these guys didn't corrupt her, they didn't touch her, she spit on them, and she spit on them in the car and all that was on tape. He said so everything that you hear is not true. He said I don't want to see Beaufort County go down the road of Chicago and I don't want to see; I don't want to waste your time having to deal with these problems because as a police commissioner I had to deal with them. He said and what a fiasco. He said you guys have a lot more important jobs to deal with than this. He said for that reason I think we need to work this thing out the best way that we can. He said if you need a liaison to help you solve this I'll be glad to volunteer to help you guys do this, but I think a lot of all you guys, but I also think a lot of Ernie Coleman and he's never mistreated me. He said he's done what he said he would do and he's an elected official therefore you can't control him. He said he has a job to do. He said you can fire him; you cannot vote him in anymore, you can do the same thing with these guys. He said what concerns me about this is what if these guys defund him or if this thing doesn't work out and it ends up hurting their career. He said that's what's worrying me so having said that, I hope I didn't step on anybody's toes because I still consider you all friends but on the other hand I think we need to support our Sheriff.

Commissioner Deatherage said let me answer a couple of your concerns. He said the intention of this group is fact finding, it is not defunding. He said there was never a thought to defund, He said if we did have a Sheriff's Department and police it would cost the same amount of money. He said we would figure a way to make it happen or we wouldn't do it. He said if it came to a point where it didn't look like it was feasible, I can't speak for all the other Commissioners, but I can speak for myself and Commissioner Richardson, there's no intention of spending any more money. He said the idea is to become more efficient, run the jail more efficiently and do everything that needs to be done in such a manner that it's good for the people of Beaufort County. He said if it's not good for the people of Beaufort County then I'm sure we would be voted out and you would go with a different plan. He said again, I keep hearing there's a defunding process going on. He said nothing could be further from the truth. He said we spent more money with the Sheriff's Department last year than we ever have. He said we spend a lot of money on the Sheriff's Department.

Mayor Williams you spent Covid money to fund the schools.

Commissioner Deatherage said the Covid money is funding part of it. He said they need to make a decision on how to protect the schools. He said there's a lot of options on how to do that to achieve the best public safety so we would make that decision at that time. He said I have my personal feelings, opinions on what's best but again it would take four Commissioners to make the better choice, the better plan. He said I think there's ways to keep our children safe in a manner that would create an impossibility of there ever being a drastic danger situation ever happening in Beaufort County. He said I think you know what I'm talking about.

Mayor Williams said I know I'm the Mayor of Aurora but Richland Township, I get calls from everywhere so I still worry about the south side of the river so it could very well affect us. He said I want us safe on the south side of the river. He said I'd just like to see you all make the right decision here. He said this could be a bad money issue and I don't want to see that happen. He said you guys have certainly been good to my town and again, I consider you all to be my friends. He said I think you all do a good job; it just concerns me what could happen.

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

Commissioner Deatherage said I'll answer that, it is a big decision to make and again, it would be all of the Commissioners, we're just fact finders but it would be a political decision and if it's made correctly it could be a good one. He said regardless, it needs to be done well and thought out precisely in order to affect that kind of outcome.

Mayor Williams said will the police have the same authority as the Sheriff.

Commissioner Deatherage said the police commissioner would not have that same authority as a Sheriff but combined with a Sheriff who's still in office in the County you would still have the same coverage that you have now, absolutely.

Mayor Williams said I want to make sure there's coverage on that side of the river.

Commissioner Deatherage said we would, yes he would, it's a county police force. He said he can go wherever we tell him. He said we could, if we thought it was best to put a station right where you want it to be, in your town. He said it would be served by the County, why, because your people pay County taxes, that's why and that's how. He said you've got to put them somewhere, might as well be in Aurora.

Commissioner Walker said one thing I want to correct. He said I think we've worked out the ability for resource officer to leave campus in pursuit with agreement, with mutual aid agreements with local departments. He said that's what's going to happen with our new arrangements that the school has with the private company. He said I'm very confident this could be.

Mayor Williams said they will be able to make arrests in the County as well.

Commissioner Walker right. He said if there's a situation where a pursuit has to be in this private officer, I'm pretty sure he'll be able to pursue and with everybody else, as it does now, joining the chase, if you will. He said but if it originates on school property and the school resource officer initiates the chase then this thing could carry off of campus, throughout the county and beyond, if need be. He said so that's, I wanted to correct that. He said the other thing, you're right, I don't have a problem with the Sheriff at all. He said once again, I'm a new commissioner but I've never met him, so I don't have an opinion about him. He said I've asked Representative Kidwell if he would organize a meeting between us and the Sheriff and I'm glad to see you volunteer, I'll ask you too. He said so work that out, in this room, I'll meet any time.

Mayor Williams said if I can get this worked out we can put this to rest.

Commissioner Walker said I agree with you, I'm not a fan of this. He said I'm here to learn why we should do it and I'm depending on these guys to teach me. He said Mr. Blount, back there, had a really good idea I hadn't thought about, job security. He said that's, I think we're going to have a discussion soon about the rotation of drug enforcement agents and so I don't know how the job security works if we're going to be rotating agents so that, I have more questions.

Mayor Williams said it's not very often that I've fired somebody but if I have a reason to fire somebody, that's my business and it's the same thing with the Sheriff. He said if he's got a problem with somebody, it's not something, you don't want to make this everybody's business but if you've got a problem with somebody, if you're stealing from me I don't necessarily want to tell all my employees that you're stealing but I will fire you. He said if there's an issue I don't want them to be a part of my team.

Commissioner Walker said I'm in business and I follow the same thought process

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

Mayor Williams said I want what's best for everybody, and I like all of you and I want to be fair with all of you guys and just want you all to play this thing out in the best way that we all benefit from it. He said I wish you luck, I really do.

Commissioner Deatherage said I think we're all in agreement on that.

Chairman Richardson said let me add some things to that if you guys are finished. He said you've got, there have been issues. He said don't forget I've been here for 24 years; I've seen a lot of things. He said there are issues with this Sheriff and other Sheriffs who refused to say his employees cannot use County property for personal use. He said we had that issue. He said we had people using vehicles, taking families out to eat, driving children to school, personal use of public property. He said there are state statutes that say you cannot do that and when the Sheriff was confronted with it he said he had the right, because he was a constitutional law officer, to use anything any way that he wanted to. He said that's a serious problem in my book because I'm here to keep my employees, who are County employees, from stealing from you and that's what they were doing. He said accountability has been a real serious problem in the Sheriff's Department. He said he wants to use the fact that he's a constitutional officer, well I'm a constitutional officer, you're a constitutional officer, there's nothing unique about that. He said that doesn't mean that we're not supposed to be honest. He said that doesn't give us a get out of jail free card, so we've had serious problems with accountability in the Sheriff's Department. He said they were using; I don't know what the number is now, but it was \$100,000 a year in drug buy money. He said the Sheriff refused to account for it and we had four Commissioners that refused to require him to account for how he was using that money. He said over ten years that's \$1 million. He said do you know how many drugs you can go on the street and buy for \$1 million. He said there's no accountability here. He said oh, \$5.00 bags or \$10.00 bags, how many of those can you buy for \$100,000. He said you could probably buy one for most of the County so there's serious problems with the Sheriff being willing to account. He said there's other problems in my book, with the Commissioners being weak and not requiring the Sheriff to account. He said part of the problem we have right now is because of the Commissioners because they don't want to go out on a limb and say the Sheriff has to account for the money he gets from you, the taxpayer, just like everybody else does that's an employee of the County. He said so we have got those particular problems. He said we've had problems with changing out guns every three or four years. He said I mean, how many people have we killed. He said can you wear out a gun every three- or four-years killing people, I don't think so. He said accountability is what this is about and that's where we need to go with this. He said with a pattern of authority that has been in place since about 900 A.D., having to go through one person is a serious problem in my book to get justice. He said I'm for democracy. He said you have to do that. He said if the Sheriff refuses to investigate your case and we've had the Sheriff sending out letters to people. He said I don't know how many this Sheriff sent out, but I know the prior Sheriff, basically the letter said, and I'm paraphrasing, they didn't steal enough from you for us to investigate it so we're not investigating it and you can go on from there. He said you don't need justice to be meted out based upon having to go kowtow to any public official to get justice. He said that is just not right. He said with the system that Gaston County is using, you have 11 people. He said you have a system of checks and balances. He said when the Sheriff refuses to cooperate with you, there are no checks and balances, period, none whatsoever. He said I can't tell you the number of women who have sat in my office and said to me my son was murdered and it wasn't even investigated. He said it's swept under the rug, covered up and you go on your way. He said we've got a lot of that. He said if you have a county police force you have 11 people you can go to if you use the Gaston County model, to get justice for you and your family. He said you've got seven Commissioners to talk to. He said you've got three people on the police oversight that you can talk to. He said that's not the right name, but we'll call it that for the moment. He said you've got a police chief that's hired by a county manager, and you've got a County Manager that you can go to and say things aren't right over here. He said there's not a person in this room who, if they've lived here ten years, has heard the story of well I tried to get something done about it and they won't do anything. He said another serious problem we have with accountability, and go talk to the people that do this, ask them how long should you leave someone doing drug investigations on that particular job. He said every person has told me two to three years is the limit and the reason is

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

there's so much money in drugs that it's easy to corrupt anyone with money. He said we have no roll-over in that department. He said we should be rolling over drug investigators so we get a fresh face every two to three years and you would see the level of drug activity go down so there's money in drugs. He said drugs are the thing that is driving law enforcement today because out on the street that's where the money is being handled and that's where the money is being exchanged and we need a system that County Commissioners can require the police chief, the Manager, and everybody else that's involved to actually do something about it instead of giving us lip service. He said so there's a lot of benefits that go with this and that's what we need to be looking at is what are you, the citizen, going to get that you aren't getting now if we use a county police force. He said that's what this is all about. He said do you guys have anything to add to this before we move on.

Chairman Richardson said the next item on the agenda is discussion of the pros and cons of a County Police Force. He said some of those we just talked about so since I've been talking, Commissioner Deatherage and Commissioner Walker I'll leave it up to you guys to lead off with this.

Commissioner Deatherage said you hit the high points. He said again, this is a fact-finding endeavor and again, one of the incidents mentioned, I would like to reiterate was the incident where there was a letter sent out that there was not enough of a transgression or a crime for it to be investigated and that happened some time ago. He said I believe it's been at least a decade or more when we were both Commissioners. He said so it's not only this Sheriff that seems to be some animus, maybe, between the Commissioners and the Sheriff and the School Board and the Sheriff. He said it's just that we've had situations over the years, and it has not been an effective way of operating public safety in Beaufort County on some issues. He said if we decide that there's a better way to go and again, it's going to take four Commissioners to do so then that's an endeavor we will pursue. He said however we don't know if we're going to move in that direction. He said this is a fact-finding tour. He said we have no understanding of how the facts are going to turn out. He said there's many moves we have to make in this puzzle, this game we're playing. He said I don't know; I don't have a whole lot more to say than that.

Chairman Richardson said we're done taking comments from the floor.

Ms. Brinson-Slann said I was going to make a clarification.

Chairman Richardson said no, we're not taking comments from the floor.

Ms. Brinson-Slann said I would like just a moment.

Chairman Richardson said I'm sorry but we're not taking comments from the floor.

Commissioner Walker said this letter that you're talking about, was it not, once again, the reasons for that was that the lack of deputies or he felt he needed more deputies and he was saying he couldn't, didn't want to investigate every crime and if that's the case then what we're in to now is because of the lack of deputies and my question is how many deputies do we need.

Commissioner Deatherage said if I remember correctly at that moment in time I think there were under 60 deputies.

Chairman Richardson said there were under 60 sworn deputies but the, when I first came in we had about 40 sworn deputies. He said now the County's population has not grown and now, maybe the Manager can tell us, we've got about 65 sworn deputies so we've got a lot more sworn deputies than we've ever had.

Commissioner Deatherage said we actually have more sworn deputies per capita now than we had then. He said that's the answer to your question.

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

Commissioner Walker said well no. He said somebody within the Sheriff's Office would need to tell me how many they would like and why and it might be a consideration and the whole thing, at least the animosity that seems to be occurring, might stop if we found out why we need so many deputies in the County.

Commissioner Deatherage said we are in budget right now; this is a good time to discuss this. He said I'm not clear on the problems there. He said we haven't seen or talked to the Sheriff in the last two years.

Chairman Richardson said we have never had a report in the last 15 years from the Sheriff, on the amount of crime, to the Commissioners that we have in Beaufort County. He said the Gaston County, the police force, they give a monthly report of we've had so many of this class of crime, so many of that class of crime, we made so many calls, we dealt with so many domestic issues. He said those Commissioners get a report every month so they can see what the Sheriff is doing. He said this Sheriff refuses, again we're back to accountability, this Sheriff refuses to report any of that. He said we just have to take his word for it. He said now, you've got to keep in mind I'm a surveyor, I get all over the County and I see a lot of things going on and I've seen over the years, I'm not saying recently but occasionally of deputies that didn't look like they had a lot to do. He said there's no way, at the moment, that the County Commissioners can evaluate the effectiveness of the Sheriff because of his refusal to cooperate with the Commissioners of the County. He said if you have a county police force there's no question that there will be cooperation because they're required to turn in a monthly report and the Commissioners can see what's going on and if you need more deputies it can be justified. He said now part of the Sheriff claiming we were defunding him, that's an untruth, I asked the question sitting right in that chair, if you need more deputies please give us the statistical information so we can evaluate it to see whether you need these people or not, in our mind, before we appropriate this money. He said the Sheriff refused to do that. He said so all I can tell you is we've added deputies just about every year since I've been a Commissioner to the Sheriff, and he's still claims he does not have enough. He said you need to understand that if you start producing statistics and start producing data what you wind up with is public officials who now have to show their ability to manage, and you have a way of measuring their management ability. He said we don't have that; you just have to take their word for it. He said \$100,000 a year is a lot of money to spend buying drugs and there's not a single Commissioner that can tell you the effectiveness of that program. He said where the money is spent, and I don't want to know who you gave the money to unless you closed the case. He said there's no reason if the case is closed for the Sheriff not to say we had four cases last month, the drug money really paid off, we used that, it took us a year to close the case truthfully but here's the benefit for your money. He said we get none of that. He said you don't know about any of that, and the drug business is very good in Beaufort County, so you need to keep that in mind. He said another problem, and I'll talk until you guys jump in, another problem is we have about 16 unmarked cars or so in Beaufort County. He said anyone that knows police theory knows that putting a sign on the side of the car that says Sheriff will deter a lot of crime. He said these are really, more, or less, personal use vehicles because nobody has any way of knowing who's going where, how they use them, and you've got a Sheriff who's saying he has a right to take public property and allow his employees to use them for their personal benefit, so you need to be aware. He said you need to be aware that accountability is a big problem and you're going to continue to have a problem until you do something about it. He said Commissioners fund the Sheriff. He said your tax money funds the Sheriff. He said we have a right under North Carolina law and a fiduciary responsibility to know how that money is spent. He said we don't know that. He said the highest paid deputy, last year, received \$92,000. He said multiple deputies are getting \$20,000 and \$25,000 in overtime per year. He said why, because nobody is watching. He said nobody is trying to control overtime. He said Mr. Williams, you run a business, I run a business, what's one of the things you're supposed to be doing, controlling your overtime. He said you do that with management and if you don't control it you're a poor manager and you're going out of business. He said in this case government can't go broke, we just raise taxes, you pay more money. He said right now the Sheriff's Office is open three days a week. He said with a county police force it will be open to the public five days a week. He said he decided that on his own. He said the Commissioners didn't do

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

that. He said people have complained to me about why they can't get into the Sheriff's Office, and I said he was funded to keep it open five days a week. He said so just keep that in mind.

Mayor Williams said how many days a week do they patrol.

Chairman Richardson said seven. He said better management, maintenance, standardization of vehicles, we won't have to have plush cars. He said if it was me I'd use a black and white car, very economical. He said to me that's all you need to do law enforcement. He said you can see it. He said job security is a very big deal. He said Mr. Blunt was right about that. He said people working for the County, the reason that the Sheriff can control only his deputies, lets make that clear, a lot of people say that's not true. He said the state law says he can control his deputies and the same law applies to the Register of Deeds so it's the Sheriff and the Register of Deeds and they have the same rights to hire and fire individually. He said their employees, technically, are not subject to the County policy other than to get all the benefits that County employees get and are entitled to. He said the reason they get that special power is that person, in the case of the Deputy Register of Deeds or a Deputy Sheriff has the full authority of the Sheriff and the Register of Deeds so if they're not doing their job or they're not competent or they're not cooperating, there's that bad word again, if they're not cooperating that individual who sanctioned them has the right to remove them and put somebody in their place who will do what that elected official wants them to do. He said that's the reason for that. He said but providing job security to county employees is a really big deal. He said there are a lot of people in law enforcement that I know that stay stressed out because they can be fired with virtually no notice. He said a lot of those people find jobs away from Sheriff's Departments. He said I've heard stories from deputies about doing things they didn't want to do because they wanted to keep their job, so you need to be aware that one of the reasons that at least one sheriff every year is removed from office is because they don't respect the power and authority that they have, and they get into trouble. He said so just look at the statistics on that and you can also ask yourself what happens if all seven Commissioners vote to get rid of the Sheriff. He said that, in just about every case where he's been removed that's happened, you have 100% vote from the Board of County Commissioners and the ball started rolling. He said out of favor citizens, politically out of favor citizens, everyone knows what that feels like. He said there won't be any politically out of favor citizens if we go to a county police department because everybody will be equal. He said everybody will have equal access to law enforcement on the band. He said that is really important. He said I think I've covered everything I had on there. He said there's three more items at the top of this list here and the Manager may be able to help us with some of these. He said one is who will issue gun permits if we went to a County police.

Mr. Alligood said I believe the Sheriff would still do that. He said I believe that is under his purview.

Chairman Richardson said that's in the statute, okay. He said fingerprinting for passports, how would we do that.

Mr. Alligood said the Sheriff's Office does that. He said municipal offices can do fingerprinting because they do that sometimes for folks who are required to do that for their job but I'm not sure about whether that could be used for other documents. He said I'd have to research that.

Chairman Richardson said that's something to be worked out. He said then, who will do the transports.

Mr. Alligood said when you say transports.

Chairman Richardson said prisoners.

Mr. Alligood said that would still be the responsibility of the Sheriff's Office. He said they are responsible for maintaining the jail.

Chairman Richardson said because they have the prisoners they have the custody of the prisoners.

Mr. Alligood said yes sir.

Chairman Richardson said can you guys delve anything you want to discuss.

Commissioner Deatherage said I've got one. He said I'd heard some talk about the Sheriff's Department being closed for two days a week. He said I don't know that we talked about that in open session.

Mr. Alligood said I don't recall that we have, no sir.

Commissioner Deatherage said so I guess my question is, you were aware of this.

Mr. Alligood said only recently.

Commissioner Deatherage said did the Sheriff report to you that he was closing for two days a week.

Mr. Alligood said no sir.

Commissioner Deatherage said he just did it willy-nilly.

Mr. Alligood said it's my understanding, in a conversation with the Chief Deputy, was that they were doing that in order to do some deep cleaning.

Commissioner Deatherage said but they're probably open now. He said are they back to five days a week.

Mr. Alligood said I don't know that.

Chairman Richardson said not according to a note outside their office.

Commissioner Deatherage said I had heard the deep cleaning statement and I was thinking that would just be it but please let us know if they are closed. He said I think the people need to know from an open session and we are the open session authority here in Beaufort County, if their Sheriff's Department is open five days a week. He said not seven but five.

Chairman Richardson said does anyone have anything they want to say. He said the next item on the agenda is the trip to Gaston County and Mr. Manager there's been some talk amongst the members of the Board that they may want to put that off, so I don't know where you are on this.

Mr. Alligood said I have had a follow-up conversation with Matt Rotten, who is the assistant County manager in Gaston County, and we have essentially worked out a timeframe and schedule. He said of course that's with your blessing. He said we looked at what the Committee had talked about, the first or second week in May. He said so what we had narrowed it down to was Monday, May the 10th. He said it takes about 4.5 hours to get to Gastonia if you obey the speed limit. He said so what we had anticipated was the Committee would go up that morning and then in the afternoon have a meeting with the folks he had suggested. He said that would be Mr. Rotten, Chuck Moore, who was the former County Attorney who still works in the County Manager's office, but he was there when they established all this and has a real good history on this. He said the Chief of Police, unfortunately that week is Law Enforcement week, and the Chief was going to be gone but I had a conversation with him, and he was happy for us to meet with his three assistant Chiefs, and he said he had full faith in those gentlemen to do what they needed to do, and he would be happy to have them meet with you. He said he was going to work on a member of the oversight committee to meet with and then also reach out to the Sheriff himself and ask if you could meet with the Sheriff. He said he may have a little difficulty with that, but he would certainly attempt it. He said so the idea was to go up Monday morning, meet Monday afternoon, spend the night, meet

Thursday, April 29, 2021
Police Force Committee

Tuesday morning, and then come back Tuesday afternoon, at the Committees pleasure. He said so that is what we have worked out, that is what he is working on with the schedule. He said I told him you had a meeting this week and that I would be in touch with him after that. He said the conversation we had at the last meeting was once you get past the week of the 11th we get into budget sessions with the Board, and you're tied up, essentially, that next month so it would need to be pushed to mid or late June but we're happy to work with you however you want to work it.

Chairman Richardson said what do you guys think.

Commissioner Walker said I think if we could push it back then we could meet with the Chief and get him out of his obligation to law enforcement week.

Commissioner Deatherage said I hate to waste the efforts of the Manager, thank you, God Bless you, I appreciate that, but I'm kind of with Commissioner Walker and I'm just wondering if there's any way, I know you guys are working hard and I'm trying to get things done to. He said would we take the County vehicle, the County van.

Mr. Alligood said that's what I had anticipated we would take the County van and go up as a group. He said everybody's been vaccinated so we would go up as a group and come back as a group.

Commissioner Deatherage said I'm just wondering if we did that. He said I'm a pretty good driver, the Manager could drive, Commissioner Walker you are too, is there any way we could do it in one day and not spend the night.

Chairman Richardson said you can't do justice in one day.

Commissioner Deatherage said whatever you guys want to do. He said I'm going to go with whatever you want to do but if you want to wait I'm good with that.

Chairman Richardson said if we wait I think we should set up some firm information and we're going to have to stick to it if we put these people off, just out of courtesy to them. He said so what say you.

Commissioner Deatherage said I'll make the motion that we delay until late June.

Chairman Richardson said any time the last two weeks of June.

Commissioner Deatherage said yeah, provided we're finished with the budget.

Chairman Richardson said we don't want to get to close to July 4th because there's too much traffic on the road.

Commissioner Deatherage said oh yeah, don't want to do that. He said we need to finish the budget. He said hopefully we'll be done by then.

Commissioner Walker said so that would be the firm date.

Chairman Richardson said would you say the last two weeks in June to give the Manager some flexibility.

Commissioner Walker said fine with me.

Mr. Alligood said so we anticipate, the Boards regular meeting in June is June 7th, that Monday. He said whether you adopt the budget that night or not, we don't know yet. He said we have a special called meeting scheduled for the 14th if you don't adopt on the 7th and then we can certainly look at that mid-

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

week, the week of the 14th, the week of the 21st if you'd like to do that. He said I do have a commitment the 23rd through the 26th, the City/County Manager's conference.

Commissioner Deatherage said let me ask this, what if we meet with them in July, is that a problem.

Commissioner Walker said that's fine with me.

Commissioner Deatherage said that way we definitely have the budget out of the way, the Manager's got his Commitment.

Commissioner Walker said it slows down in July a little bit to.

Chairman Richardson said it would have to be the week after the 4th, again, to avoid all that traffic. He said there's going to be a lot of people out this year because they can travel.

Commissioner Walker said I'm going to try one more time with this because I've been very pleased with Zoom meetings with the Institute of Government. He said I thought that worked really well, which solves a lot of problems. He said travel, time, everything. He said I think we could get some results. He said it certainly would be better live, in the flesh would be better than Zoom but as far as just asking and quizzing, you know, I think you could do it that way too.

Chairman Richardson said well I'd rather do it in person, but I don't mind Zoom meetings after we make the trip and make personal contact so based on that.

Commissioner Walker said as a negotiated point could we make our live trip one day and then the rest be Zoom.

Chairman Richardson said you can't do it in one day, you just can't.

Commissioner Walker said why.

Chairman Richardson said you just can't.

Mr. Alligood said I've done it in one day, it is a tough drive to Gastonia and back.

Commissioner Deatherage said I can't remember what my motion is but let me restate my motion. He said my motion is that we wait until the 2nd week in July and make a 2-day trip, one night trip to Gastonia.

Chairman Richardson said just to throw on to that, allow the Manager to work hi sway through that and let us know. He said all of the Commissioners are invited to go if they want to go.

Motion: Commissioner Deatherage motioned to delay until the 2nd week in July and make a 2-day, one night trip to Gastonia. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Richardson said is there any new business to come before the Committee.

No one spoke.

Chairman Richardson said okay, no new business. He said the next item is future dates for this Committee. He said I think we should meet again in about a month. He said I don't think we should stop meeting at all, even though that trip is out there, so the Clerk has suggested that May 20th and the 27th are budget workshops so I would just ask the Manager to thread that in and let us know.

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Police Force Committee

Mr. Alligood said normally, Mr. Chairman, you would've met on the 20th, based on your schedule you've done and of course that is a budget workshop. He said we have a special called meeting on the 17th in which we present to you the Manager's recommended budget. He said then you start deliberations on the 20th and run through that week and the next week so if you wanted to meet you would probably need to look at the week of the 10th, that same week we were looking at going to Gaston County, so look at that week. He said maybe the 13th, which is a Thursday, you have historically met on Thursdays, if you wanted to do that.

Chairman Richardson said that's in May, right.

Mr. Alligood said yes, that would be a short month.

Chairman Richardson said I may want to back up on what I said. He said we may want to wait a month and roll over until June. He said we don't have that much worth so put us into June and see what happens.

Mr. Alligood said if you want to stay on a Thursday that's the 17th, which is the second full week. He said the third full week is the 24th and you've got a half week the last week of June. He said of course, I apologize, I'm out on the 24th at the Managers conference. He said is June 17th, that's a Thursday.

Chairman Richardson said how do you guys feel about June 17th.

Commissioner Deatherage said yeah, as long as we don't have any conflict with budget.

Chairman Richardson said all right, the next meeting is June 17th at 6:00 PM in this room. He said that's Thursday. He said let me see, Madame Chairman, that's not an executive meeting for the Republican Party.

Ms. Carolyn Garris said I have no clue and I'd like to clarify, I'm here as a private citizen.

Chairman Richardson said I'd like to clarify that you can't escape what you are. He said we can get together and if we decide to change it, do something on the telephone, if we decide to change the meeting time. He said we have plenty of time to publish it so I don't see anyone would be harmed. He said if there's no other business then can I get a motion to adjourn.

Motion: Commissioner Deatherage motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Walker seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kathleen Mosher, CMC, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board