

Scotland County Board of Commissioners reconvened regular meeting with the Laurinburg City Council January 29, 2019, Small Business Innovation Center 16800-A Hwy. 401, Laurinburg, NC

Scotland County Board of Commissioners reconvened meeting with the Laurinburg City Council, January 29, 2019, Small Business Innovation Center, 16800-A Hwy. 401 Bypass, Laurinburg, NC

Commissioners in attendance: Chair Bob Davis, Commissioners Betty Blue Gholston, Whit Gibson, and Tim Ivey. Staff in attendance: County Manager Kevin Patterson, and Parks and Recreation Director Bryan Graham.

City of Laurinburg City Council Members in attendance: Mayor Matthew Block, Mayor Pro Tem Mary Jo Adams, Council Members Mary Evans, James Garby, and Curtis Leak.

Chairman Bob Davis called the reconvened meeting to order, and the invocation delivered by Laurinburg City Councilman James Garby.

Recreation Center

Mayor Block welcomed everyone including two members of the school board, Dr. Carolyn Banks and Dr. Summer Woodside (later joined by Mr. Rick Singletary, Mr. BJ Gibson, and Mr. Herman Tyson) as well as Mr. Greg Wood with Scotland County Health System. Mayor Block stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a community recreation center for the City of Laurinburg. Mayor Block stated that the major players in this initiative was still in favor and needed to know where to go from here after the referendum was voted down in the fall election. Mayor Block stated that it had been the long standing desire for the citizens of Laurinburg to have a recreation center and that he had the understanding that if the referendum didn't pass then the County couldn't build a recreation center. County Manager Kevin Patterson explained that not only would there be capital cost but also a yearly maintenance cost of about \$500,000 annually. Mayor Block stated that he wanted to see if the County wasn't going to build a recreation center if this was something that Laurinburg City Council would want to take on as a project and if the other community entities would be interested especially from Scotland Health System. Mr. Wood stated that the hospital would be willing to take a role in the recreation but not a lead role and supports it as a collaborative effort and might be willing to provide some financial support. Mayor Block also inquired if the school board would be willing to provide financial support to which it was replied that it was a good idea but no financial support was committed. Commissioner Gholston asked about the anticipated cost of the center to which Mayor Block stated that it was hard to come to a number on a center. Mayor Block also stated that he thought it was very important for a recreation center if the county is going to be desirable as a retirement community to provide recreation opportunities for seniors. Mayor Block stated that he felt that the city council envisioned a central recreation/community center and maybe one center is not the answer but multiple facilities, each with its own features. Mayor Block stated that he felt the referendum could pass during a primary election more likely than during a general

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election. Mayor Block asked if the Board would be able to provide any financial assistance for a recreation center. Chairman Davis stated that this was not something that the Board had not made any decision. Chairman Davis stated that in the long range plan for the county that a recreation center at the Morgan Center was included. Commissioner Gibson stated that while it is true that an overwhelming majority of people in the county support recreation, the breakdown comes in what that should look like. Commissioner Gibson also stated that he believed the defeat of the referendum was damaging because it was going to give the County a means to operate the center and currently he isn't sure that there would be funds to operate the center as it should be operated. Chairman Davis stated that he felt like everyone needed to be in the same boat paddling in the same direction. Discussion followed. Commissioner Gibson then asked Mayor Block if he was asking for support from the County for the City to build a recreation center. Mayor Block stated that he felt the only way a recreation center would get built in the center of Laurinburg would be if the City of Laurinburg built it and he felt that the schools and health system could assist financially. Councilman Curtis Leak gave a history of recreation and stated that the City of Laurinburg has always supported the County in recreation through funding and other support and didn't think that the City should duplicate services that the County already provide and let all of the citizens of Scotland County enjoy a recreation center. If the City were to do the recreation center, would all citizens of the County be able to use it for free? Councilman Leak also called for teamwork, and praised the plan developed by Scotland County Parks and Recreation Director Bryan Graham. Mayor Block inquired if the school board's main interest was in an indoor swimming pool. Mr. Rick Singletary stated that the swim team would indeed be interested in an indoor swimming pool. Mr. BJ Gibson inquired of the County where we were now that the referendum was defeated. County Manager Kevin Patterson stated that the recreation center was not a top priority and honestly doesn't know how to go forward unless the commissioners wanted to raise taxes. The capital cost of the facility was going to be 10-12 million dollars and if a twenty year bond were to be done it would be about \$700,000 per year plus operating cost. According to Mr. Patterson there just isn't flexibility within the budget of a million dollars. Without having significant additional revenue options on the table, Mr. Patterson stated there is not a plan that he could recommend to the commissioners. Commissioner Gibson stated that he feels that the commissioners are still interested in the discussion and the recreation center is still on the parks and recreation plan but the problem occurs with the funding to operate the center. Dr. Carolyn Banks stated that she was speaking for herself that she doesn't feel like people knew what they were voting for on the referendum and that there needs to be communication and teamwork going forward. Commissioner Gholston asked how to go about doing more for communication? Commissioner Ivey stated that from what he heard was that there was not support because there wasn't a plan for the recreation center but people weren't necessarily opposed. Commissioner Gibson stated that it was up to this group to communicate the need for a recreation center. School Board member Rick Singletary stated that the group has to have a honest conversation amongst the group before they

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try to sell it to the public. City Council member Mary Evans stated that citizens don't feel like they are not getting anything back for what is being asked. Mr. Singletary stated that he is concerned about access to all students as well as other issues that need to have an honest assessment. Councilman Curtis Leak suggested a plan for the county commissioners to send two representatives, the city to send two representatives, the school system to send two representatives, the hospital system to send two representatives, and the chamber to send one representative for a total of nine to work with the current recreation board to get the process going. This group would be responsible to try to get things moving and trying to get a plan together. Commissioner Gholston stated that it would be important to have a sales tax referendum because no one has the funds to do a recreation center by themselves. Commissioner Gibson stated he wanted to make sure that everyone was talking about a referendum for the primary of 2020. Commissioner Ivey stated that there needs to be a drawn plans and how to pay for it. He stated he didn't think it was understood about the operating expense. Mayor Block once again explained his idea about having a more centralized location that would be a community center as well as recreation center as well as having two other facilities to the individuals who joined the meeting late. City Councilman Garby stated that the recreation center could be built in phases as a more affordable way to do it. Board of Education member BJ Gibson stated that he agreed with Councilman Leak's recommendation. Mayor Pro Tem Mary Jo Adams stated that City Council pledged support to the County and that she would not be supportive of citizens of Laurinburg bearing the tax burden for a recreation facility. Mr. Wood with the hospital system stated that a recreation facility was never the plan for the hospital system but they would support a community based facility and if they could do something to fit their healthcare mission that might be a possibility. Commissioner Gibson suggested each respective board going back to the larger board and commit to sending a couple of representatives and the mission would be is to see what the community wants. If the County and City look like they can't come to an agreement on the needs of each it might be time to do individual projects. Commissioner Gibson stated that he believes that the group needs to try to do something together. Chairman Davis stated that he has been involved in recreation for years and he is all for recreation. Commissioner Gholston stated that she was proud of what Wagram has done and what the County has done for Wagram.

Adjournment

Having no further business, **Motion was made by Commissioner Gholston to adjourn and it was duly seconded by Commissioner Ivey. Vote: Unanimous**

J. Jason Robinson
Deputy Clerk to the Board

Bob Davis
Chair

(County Seal)