

March 20, 2020

The Bladen County Board of Commissioners held an Emergency Meeting to address matters related to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) at 4:00pm on Friday, March 20, 2020. The meeting was held in the Superior Courtroom, 106 East Broad Street, Elizabethtown, NC.

Members present were:

Ray Britt, Chairman

David Gooden, Vice Chairman

Charles Peterson

Michael Cogdell (arrived at 4:04pm)

Arthur Bullock

Dr. Ophelia Munn-Goins

Russell Priest

Daniel Dowless

Excused: Ashley Trivette

Call to Order:

Chairman Britt called the meeting to order and provided an invocation. County Manager Greg Martin led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ITEM 1. Update Regarding COVID-19

Health and Human Services Director Dr. Terri Duncan provided an update regarding public health related issues.

During Dr. Duncan's update, Commissioner Cogdell arrived.

Dr. Duncan stated that guidelines change daily regarding response to the pandemic. She also shared that flu diagnoses have risen during the past two weeks.

Dr. Duncan assured those in attendance that the Health Department would be contacted immediately if a Bladen County resident tested positive for the virus.

Emergency Services Director Nathan Dowless provided an update regarding potential shortages of personal protection equipment (PPE), isolation gowns, respirators, masks. He stated that shipments are anticipated in the coming weeks.

Mr. Dowless stated that as of the morning of March 20, there have been eighty-four (84) counties that have declared States of Emergency. He indicated that a prepared document was available if the Board determined the need to declare.

Mr. Martin stated that a State of Emergency declaration was not necessary, during this pandemic, to be considered for FEMA reimbursement, as the Federal Government has relaxed that requirement. However, Mr. Martin did share that approving a declaration would be wise if the Board wanted to consider limiting or prohibiting access to county facilities.

Chairman Britt expressed gratitude to Dr. Duncan and Mr. Dowless for their leadership during this unprecedented event.

ITEM 2. Consider Suspending Public Access to County Facilities (not including the Bladen County Courthouse):

Mr. Martin provided an overview of plans to continue providing county services while suspending public access. He stated that plans could be activated to assist residents outside county facilities.

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Judge Doug Sasser addressed the Board regarding the exclusion of the Courthouse. He stated that, by statute, the courthouse and courthouse activities must be available to certain cases such as first appearances, child welfare, etc.

Following discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Gooden, the Board unanimously approved suspending public access to county facilities (not including the Bladen County Courthouse).

ITEM 3. Consider Adopting COVID-19 Temporary Teleworking Policy:

Mr. Martin provided an overview of the policy which would allow employees, during this specific COVID-19 pandemic, an opportunity to work from home. He stated that this policy could affect those who dealt with computer work.

Following discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Bullock, the Board unanimously approved a COVID-19 Temporary Teleworking Policy.

ITEM 4. Consider Adopting COVID-19 Temporary Advanced Sick Leave Policy:

Mr. Martin reviewed the draft policy regarding the advancement of up to two weeks (at regularly scheduled hours) for employees who may have or will exhaust accrued Sick and Vacation leave. The policy would allow the employee to enter into a negative Sick Leave balance, with a payback by offsetting the negative leave amount by the regular biweekly accrual for the employee.

Following discussion and upon a motion by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Gooden, the Board adopted the policy on a vote of five (5) AYES (Peterson, Gooden, Priest, Britt, Dowless) to three (3) NOES (Munn-Goins, Cogdell, Bullock).

ITEM 5. Consider Canceling the Regular and Special Board Meetings scheduled for Monday, March 23, 2020

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bullock, seconded by Commissioner Munn-Goins, the Board unanimously canceled the regular and Special Board meetings scheduled for Monday, March 23, 2020.

Chairman Britt asked that the Board consider a deadline extension for citizens to pay their taxes prior to advertisement in the Bladen Journal. He stated that a number of tax payers had approached him, stating that the pandemic had caused them to re-prioritize their business decisions. The deadline previously established by the Board during the February 3, 2020 meeting was March 20, 2020.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Cogdell, seconded by Commissioner Munn-Goins, the Board unanimously extended the date to pay real property taxes to June 1, 2020 in order to avoid advertisement.

Commissioner Peterson expressed appreciation to Dr. Duncan, Mr. Dowless and Mr. Martin for their leadership during this situation.

Commissioner Gooden inquired regarding how students are completing their assignments with school closures. Mr. Dowless stated that Star Telephone will be placing Wi-Fi hotspots at various school locations which can be accessed from the school parking lot for students who do not have internet access at home. He stated that a number of other public sites would also be provided Wi-Fi hotspots as well. He shared that there were seven to nine planned locations throughout the county. He also stated that the Sheriff's

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Office would provide guidance regarding safe parking, allowing enough space between cars, etc.

Chairman Britt asked for consideration regarding a declaration of State of Emergency. Upon a motion by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Gooden, the Board unanimously approved the State of Emergency Declaration.

Commissioner Bullock expressed appreciation to County management for providing services for the benefit of citizens.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Munn-Goins, the Board unanimously adjourned the Emergency Meeting at 5:24pm.

ATTEST:

Maria C. Edwards, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board

Ray Britt
Chairman