



CCA Member Meeting Minutes

27 April 2023

Call to Order at 6PM

Pledge of Allegiance

Introduction of the Board by Barb Marzetti, President: Wayne Evans, Vice President; Tony Cerri, Secretary; Ben Watson, member. Scott Quigley, absent. A quorum was established.

Guest speaker – Mr. Bob White, Currituck County Commissioner, and chairman of the Board of Commissioners.

Inflationary increases cost Currituck +4% in the last year. County, intentionally, does not operate at a profit.

All was good with the existing budget plan for schools, but school expansion went from \$15M to \$23M overnight. County had money in reserves to handle planned costs but not that much. Also had money in reserves for new elementary school but school cost went from \$25M to \$50M. Haven't gotten the final costs yet. All will require more planning.

The Board of Commissioners (BoC) is looking to slow down development on mainland by increasing the size of lots; move to 1 acre minimum. Mixed Residential (MXR) buildings are being considered. Want residential development focused on MXR.

Worker housing or entry level homes aren't available in Currituck. BoC is looking to solve the problem without being a bedroom community for Dare and Virginia. Rezoning of residential and General Business (GB) areas is coming. Developers want GB. Rezoning will lead to a need for new schools.

SAGA wants to build a resort/conference center 400 seats plus stores and apartments. Business on bottom floor and housing for owners or workers above. There will be high end apartments in the north end of the development. SAGA understands we don't need more houses. They asked to raise the height of building 5' above current maximum. BoC is considering the request.

Commented [BM1]: This was mainland project?

The new ABC store is due to be finished in December/January. Will be closing the old ABC store.

An Opioid Task Force is forming. Will be led by Denise and Matt Khouri. Might be housed in the old ABC building. Denise is working to get counselors up to Corolla a couple days a week.

Mr. White knows we need medical facilities and staff in Corolla.

Currituck needs a 4-cent tax increase just to get back to the break-even point. Schools ask for 7 resource officers (RO) at cost of a little over \$1M. Really need only 6 now because the 7th is for new school. Then ROs

will need cars at \$60K per car. Over 1.5M for new RO's and cars. Debate if they are necessary. A decision will have to be made to raise taxes to fund.

Lots of other financial pressures are potentially leading to a gigantic tax increase for Currituck. Taxes have been low for a long time.

Schools normally get \$1.4M annually for repairs. Schools did a building maintenance study and, as a result, they ask for an additional \$3.5M annually for the next 5 years. These are big ticket items that can't be put off.

Q. What is the source of revenue that pays for these increases? What taxes are increasing? Where does Occupancy Tax (OT) fit in?

A. Ad valorem property taxes pay most. Land transfer tax is fund restricted and can only go for capital improvements for county buildings. OT is restricted to 1/3 tourism advertising and 2/3 for tourism related expenditures. BoC acts as tourism development authority and decides if a cost is appropriate for OT. OT bought sidewalks, Whalehead Club. Purchase of the Center for Wildlife Education in July will come out of OT.

Corolla roads need repair. NC DoT wants to start roadwork in 2024. DoT is 2 years behind on contracts. If DoT does not start by Jan 2024, then Mr. White will start pushing them. The entire repaving project is in segments and each segment has an 18-month period when work could start. It may be 2030 before Corolla roads are finished. DoT is funded from gas taxes. When engines got more fuel efficient, & folks drove less during COVID, NC DoT revenues went down. Comment - Harris Teeter should be the priority area for restriping. Mr. White agrees.

Mr. White discussed a bond referendum and explained it would have to be voted on in a general election. Currituck currently doesn't have a bond rating. Would need the rating before being able to take on a bond and it is a lot of work just to obtain the rating. BoC is going back to the drawing board to determine if new school can be put off a couple years.

The Sheriff wants 4 new deputies to reflect growth and 15 new vehicles. Regular car rotation hasn't worked. Need 10 cruisers and 5 Tahoes. However, payroll issues have been taken care of; they are now fully staffed.

\$2M is needed for maintenance of county buildings in the next couple of years.

Q. What about redistricting even if it is never popular? A. Holding schools' feet to fire to ensure requested items and Tull's Creek school are all needed. Currituck will need redistricting until new schools are built.

Q. What is being done to look at federal and state grants and external funding in general to support things like road repair and school maintenance?

A. Counties can't touch roads or ditches, so Currituck has nothing to do with that; private roads owned by HoAs are funded by owner assessments. Not sure if there is anything in the national infrastructure bill for Corolla. Currituck goes after grants wherever we can. Schools must apply for federal money. Anything left over goes into the school's fund balance & they have too much in fund balance at moment which BoC wants them to spend down.

Fire and EMS equipment is getting old. A new engine costs \$650K and takes 2 years to get built. Will try to replace 1 piece of equipment every year. Currituck also needs ambulances. Takes 2 years to acquire and they are not cheap even with insurance.

Q. Anything in the budget for Whalehead FD? It is an old building.

A. Buildings are owned by the FD non-profit. Currituck gives them some money to help take care of need. They also do fund raisers. We have fire tax to pay for the “paid” firefighters. We do not want to get to a paid fire department throughout the county. The current mix of volunteer and paid staff is working well.

Q. Is there a plan to raise the fire tax?

A. No in Mr. White’s opinion.

A key desire from the FD is false alarm ordinance enforcement. 500 calls last year but 49% false alarms. FD would like to fix the repeat offender problem. Mr. White said he would follow up.

Beach erosion. The 3-year study looking at the status of Currituck beaches is complete. Mr. Beaumont is posting his displeasure with the study on Moyock Facebook page but does not speak for all commissioners. BoC is committed to getting beaches stabilized. Mr. White took commissioners out to see the damage after their retreat in Corolla and they have a better appreciation. There is no other answer for Currituck besides beach stabilization; too valuable not to. Moving forward with creating a beach management plan which was a key recommendation of the study. Mr. White believes our beaches will be different than what happened in Nag’s Head because we have different sand.

Q. No residents on mainland will pay taxes for beach nourishment. Why not?

A. Politics. Commissioners will not vote to raise mainland taxes for the beach. Will use a portion of OT and most likely create special service district

Q. Is there a timeline for beach nourishment?

A. First, Currituck must establish the required qualifications of bidding companies to go in a request for proposal to get a firm selected to create the management plan. The county will start on this after the budget deliberations. Will take years to finish the plan and obtain the proper permits to begin work.

Q. Have the commissioners voted on beach nourishment?

A. Commissioners ‘agreed’ to move forward creating a beach management plan. Part of that plan will include details of nourishment. Commissioners will ‘vote’ when the beach management plan is finished, and then an engineering firm will be brought in to give a cost of beach nourishment.

Q. Can CAMA and other federal-agency permits be requested without a full beach nourishment plan in order to accelerate the process?

A. No. The best case is probably 3 years before beach nourishment starts.

Q. What is the ballpark amount of QT that comes in and could it be all put on nourishment?

A. Yes, all of OT could be put on beach nourishment but then county would have to tax other things to make up the shortfall where OT is currently used. Mr. White feels that a portion of OT will be used to offset beach nourishment.

Q. Who sets the OT rate?

A. The state sets the rates and how to use. It is in Corolla’s best interest not to ask for changes because leaders in Raleigh want to use the money for other things.

Q. Could the wind farms being built off Corolla be asked to help with beach nourishment? Avangrid [the wind farm building company] said they have funds available to offset their impact. Mr. White is not sure what that looks like or how to proceed. Mr. White is not a big fan of the Avangrid briefings he has been given. Section 106 for national register was mentioned and explained. A comment was made that if no one asks for funds, or aggressively investigates available funds, then no one will get money; must get involved to see an outcome. County managers need to understand what Avangrid has to offer.

A. Mr. White will have the county manager dig into the process.

Lots of discussion about turbines ensued.

Q. What about Dare using sand off Corolla coast to accomplish their beach nourishment?

A. There was a suggestion they should use our sand. Mr. White called Senator Hanig and he believes that can be stopped.

Questions from online:

Q. Can the south beach access be made safer?

A. There are lights and a crosswalk which is the usual crosswalk treatment. The questioner later clarified that the lights don't appear to be working. Mr. White said they were when he came through that area for the meeting.

Q. What about repairing the ADA ramp?

A. It is being bid. Need a complete replan to meet ADA and CAMA rules.

Q. Where in Whalehead Club will the playground be located?

A. Right in front of the picnic pavilion and in place of the air up station.

Q. Possible to use roll up walkways for access to the beach by wheelchairs and other people with limited physical abilities?

A. Good idea. Don't have staff to manage them. Must be a way to solve the problem.

Q. Looking at the SAGA proposal. If we are already having trouble staffing, do you ever see us get to a breaking point of too much development.

A. At the end of the day, it is the property owner's right to develop. Currituck can't really deny it. Saga planned less than it could. They are going under approved density limits. SAGA wants to do a nice development.

This generated a lot of unfavorable comments and discussion about the project. Mr. White explained the things that would be necessary to stop the project.

Q. Does county have a process to have developers contribute to infrastructure?

A. Used to but no more. Only minimal things we can tell them to do.

Q. Currituck doesn't have enough workers to keep county museums open on weekends but now additional things are being approved that will require staffing. Once something has been planned, is it too late to put a tax on it that would facilitate people being able to live and work in the community?

A. Currituck cannot do that. Cities can but counties can't

Q. Has County looked at mixed use for existing facilities.

A. No but that's not a bad idea.

Q. Some of the SAGA project may not be accessible to current Currituck FD equipment. Who is checking?

A. That, along with many other things, is something the County checks after the builder submits their plan. State, CAMA and other agencies also examine.

Q. What will happen when Currituck County takes over the Center for Wildlife Education?

A. County wants it to stay the same. Hiring the existing staff is hope. Auditorium should be available for use.

Q. What about the lot right next to the center?

A. Would like to reopen the walkway/pier closed after it was damaged by a storm. Maybe dredge in Whalehead basin to get some boats in.

Q. What are the plans for the Muskrat study area [undeveloped area just to north of FLOBX development]?

A. Maybe expand car parking. No other plans now.

This concluded Mr. White's comments.

Mr. Cerri provided some comments about Avangrid and the wind turbine farm. Avangrid has been responsive to emails and questions. The towers they are building will be 1041' and tallest in the world. Construction is scheduled to start within the year. Asked about painting towers battleship grey to limit visibility. Avangrid explained FAA requirements are white or light grey. Asked about using more 500' towers instead of fewer 1,041' towers as 500' towers wouldn't be visible. Avangrid explained 500' are not made anymore. All navigation lights will go on and off at the same time and will be visible from Corolla. Asked about recent articles saying DoD is objecting to turbine farms. Avangrid explained the objection is on future farms asking to be approved and not the one they are building.

Minutes approved from last meeting.

Q. What about the OT lawsuit against Currituck?

A. Haven't heard from the court of appeals. There is no time limit.

Meeting adjourned at 8:06