

**GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
DECEMBER 11, 2015**

The Gates County Board of Commissioners met in a Special Session at 2:00 p.m. Friday, December 11, 2015 at the Merchants Millpond State Park, 176 Millpond Road, Gatesville. Commissioners Hofler, Owens, Jordan, Felton and Freeman were present. Also present was County Manager, Natalie Rountree and Senator Bill Cook.

Chairman Hofler called the meeting to order and announced the meeting was going to be very informal and encouraged everyone to have back and forth dialogue.

Joy Greenwood welcomed everyone to the Millpond and expressed her excitement about the bond referendum. The \$870,000 would help improve campground facilities and would be a great addition to the new building that was built 6 years ago. Currently there is a family campground that does not have water and electric hookups but the bond would allow for water and electric hookups to be installed to encourage visitors to stay longer. Senator Cook asked about current attendance. Ms. Greenwood stated in the spring and the fall there are times where they often have every campsite and kayak rental booked at one time. The Millpond is the closet park to the Great Dismal Swamp park, it is on the way to the Outer Banks and makes for a good weekend get-a-way for folks from Raleigh. Senator Cook asked if there was any idea about how much economic growth the renovated campsites would provide for the area. Ms. Greenwood did not have an amount of extra contributions to economic growth but stated the current visitation is about 250,000 visitors a year. Commissioner Owens asked if there is a footprint of what the renovations will look like. Ms. Greenwood stated she can call the construction office in Raleigh to try to get that information on site. Chair Hofler stated having this type of information on site may be good to show people to help encourage folks to be in support of the referendum.

Chair Hofler stated as a Tier 1 county and money is in short supply especially for school construction. Senator Cook mentioned he was just at the Middle School and there are some big problems there. Chair Hofler stated it is hard to find sources of money, we were excited about the sales tax redistribution but unfortunately it did not pass fully. Senator Cook stated although the original version did not pass the version that did is projected to bring in another \$500,000 a year to Gates County; which would help in building a new school. The school is so broken down it must cost a fortune in maintenance and utilities. The plumbing situation is pathetic and despite all of the issues there is some good teaching going on out there. Senator Cook expressed his frustration on the amount of money that is spent on College and University facilities and professor salaries but yet we can't invest in our local elementary, middle and high schools. We need to get back to focusing on science and math and encouraging kids to become educated in vocational trades and not just trying to push a college education on everyone. Commissioner Owens stated due to the budget we had to get rid of carpentry and auto mechanics because you had to be able to pay for a certified teacher. Chair Hofler stated there is still an agricultural program, health programs, and computer programs. There are still some vocations just not carpentry, masonry or auto mechanics.

Commissioner Jordan asked what we can look forward to going forward with ADM and lottery funds. Senator Cook stated he will continue to push for the lottery funds to be spent on education. The Board discussed the continuous reduction in the lottery funds the county is seeing and how it is not being used for school funding. The Board stated counties would like to see the money designated for school construction. Senator Cook stated a government should not be run based on gambling, it sends the wrong message to young people and it enables individuals that have serious problems but we have it and it is what it is now so we need to spend the money on where we said we were going to spend it. The State was in a really bad state about 4 year years when the budget was off about 2 billion dollars and we owed the federal government about 3 billion dollars and the previous administration wanted to increase taxes in the middle of a recession. There were a ton of regulations that stifled small businesses which slows down the entire economy. Chair Hofler stated the unfunded mandates with DSS and Medicaid changes are really hurting County funding as well. Senator Cook stated if we can broaden the base of sales tax it will

help counties with a 50/50 split. It is likely the tax redistribution topic will come up again in the upcoming long session. The sales tax redistribution is trying to address the huge gap between well off areas of the state and the poor areas.

Commissioner Jordan asked about future funding for CDBG homes. Senator Cook wasn't a familiar with the CDBG funding but believes we were losing some federal funds that went into the program which is what is causing the issue.

Chair Hofler stated the DOT funding formula is a big concern for Gates County because it is likely we won't get projects in the future. Senator Cook stated the formula is supposed to put everyone on a equal ground and provide project funding for the areas that need it so that we can get away from the good ol' boy system. NC has the second most amount of roads in miles in the country, only Texas has more miles of road. In the past transportation funds have been spent on the wrong projects like Jeannette's Pier.

Commissioner Jordan asked about funding for promoting Cooperative Extension and Soil and Water Conservation, we are an agricultural community. Senator Cook stated there are some folks that are sincerely behind and support agriculture. To make this economy grow we have to have a solid agricultural foundation. Based on the stats and products produced in Gates County it is clear that agriculture is the foundation. Please let the office know if there are any concerns that your farmers have. You can call the office or send a letter.

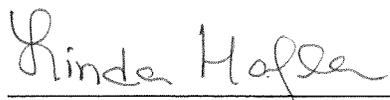
Commissioner Freeman stated we have a danger issue out in front of our schools. We have asked DOT for caution lights and they have denied our request. We have been given the option to pay \$12,000 to have a light put up and then we have to maintain it. Senator Cook stated they can reach out to Jerry Jennings to see about some discretionary funds. Ms. Rountree stated Mr. Jennings is aware of the situation and has seen the letter. Senator Cook recommended sending a resolution to him to look into discretionary funds.

Commissioner Owens stated we have started some dialogue already and we are in need of a senior center. Senator Cook stated there are only so many dollars and priorities must be in line, it appears that middle school is a major priority and a huge liability.

Chair Hofler thanked Senator Cook for taking time to visit Gates County.

#### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Felton made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jordan seconded the motion; motion passed unanimously.

  
Linda Hofler, Chairman

  
Melissa C. Lawrence, Clerk

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