

AT A MEETING OF THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS HELD
ON MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2024, IN THE BOARD ROOM OF THE HISTORIC
COURTHOUSE, SALUDA, VIRGINIA:

Present: Wayne H. Jessie, Sr., Jamaica District
Don R. Harris, Saluda District
William A. Harris, Hartfield District
Reginald A. Williams, Sr., Harmony Village District
Randy Crittenden, Pinetop District

Matthew L. Walker, County Administrator
Heather W. Lewis, County Attorney
Shanae Hammond, Executive Assistant/ Deputy Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Don Harris called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Attendance was taken by Mrs. Hammond with the following roll call: Supervisor Williams – Present; Supervisor Bill Harris – Present; Supervisor Crittenden – Present; Supervisor Jessie – Present; and Chairman Don Harris– Present. There was a quorum.

BUDGET CALENDAR UPDATE

Mr. Walker discussed adding an additional budget work session, which would result in the following budget calendar:

Tuesday, April 2, 2024,	Work Session at 9:00 a.m.
Thursday, April 11, 2024,	Advertisement of proposed County budget public hearing, including the school Budget and proposed County tax rates. A public hearing on the budget is to be held at 7 p.m. at the Historic Courthouse on Thursday, April 25, 2023.
Thursday, April 18, 2024,	7:00 p.m., the Board of Supervisors public hearing on the proposed County budget, including the School Budget and Tax Rates, Historic Court House. - Meeting continued to 7 p.m., Thursday, April 11, 2024, for deliberation, revision, if any, and action on the budget.
Thursday, April 25, 2024,	7:00 p.m., Deliberation, revision (if any), and adoption of the County Budget, School Budgets, and Tax Rates.

BUDGET REVIEW

1. Dr. Seitz and Mrs. Murray addressed the board with the questions and concerns raised by the board after receiving notice that the school's budget had changed. The changes were (1) an increase to the school's health insurance premium from 2% to 9% and (2) the state's approved COLA.

Dr. Seitz discussed researching seven neighboring counties to determine what percent of health insurance was borne by the school division. She noted that although the Middlesex school district has three options, she compared only two health plans which were standard to most counties researched, with the following results.

- Key Advantage 1000

Single (76 - 100%). The average covered by the school is 90%; Middlesex is 96%

Dual (48 - 83%). The average covered by the school is 67%; Middlesex is 68%
Family (33 - 73%). The average covered by the school is 56%; Middlesex is 55%

- High Deductible Health Plan

Single (89 - 100%). The average covered by the school is 97%; Middlesex is 100%
Dual (63 - 90%). The average covered by the school is 74%; Middlesex is 80%
Family (39 - 80%). The average covered by the school is 62%; Middlesex is 66%

Chairman Don Harris asked what insurance plan had the most participants. Dr. Seitz responded that most employees are on the "single plan." She added that insurance is expensive and is a deterrent when hiring. Not all applicants are able to afford the insurance.

Supervisor Williams asked if the school offers a refund for employees participating in the high-deductible plan. Dr. Seitz responded that only a portion is put into the HSA because the premium is cheaper than the actual contribution.

Chairman Don Harris asked if 9% was the final answer after negotiating with Anthem. Dr. Seitz responded yes.

Mr. Walker asked if Anthem explained the increase. Dr. Seitz responded that it was based on how Anthem's underwriting system was measured with a larger pool.

After much discussion about health insurance, Dr. Seitz noted that she was also requested to research how competitive Middlesex teacher salaries were with neighboring jurisdictions. She researched nine neighboring counties (not including West Point) to determine how Middlesex teachers' salaries compare. Looking at the 2023-2024 school year salaries, step zero through thirty, with ranking levels of zero through ten, with ten being the lowest, the following results were obtained.

- Step 0 – which is a brand-new teacher with no experience, Middlesex ranks six out of nine.
- Steps 1 - 4 Middlesex ranks five out of nine.
- Steps 5 - 9 Middlesex ranks four out of nine.
- Steps 10 – 22 – teachers with ten years or more of experience, Middlesex ranks five out of nine.
- Steps 24 - 30 Middlesex ranks six out of nine.

Dr. Seitz stated that at the last superintendent's meeting she attended, everyone recommended a 3% raise. Middlesex included their budget with a 1.3% step increase, which is not considered a raise but more money for the employees. It simply means they will move up a level by having more additional years of experience. For example, the new teachers that have finished their first year will be on step one, which is their 1.3% increase. She added that the Governor's proposed budget had a 1% bonus for the SOQ-funded employees, which can be used towards a 1.3% step increase, giving the school an additional \$34,013 from the state. That is what was included in the school's budget request. The General Assembly proposed a 3% compensation increase, stating that the school divisions must give at least a 1.5% increase to receive the prorated amount. The County will receive nothing from the state if only the 1.3% step increase is provided. Currently, Middlesex has a 1132 Average Daily Membership (ADM), but with the number of kindergartners coming in the fall, the new ADM is expected to be 1160, resulting in \$97,400 from the state. That could be higher, but without the calculation tool, which has not been received yet, an accurate number is unavailable.

Supervisor Bill Harris asked what the terminology is for students who live in another county. Dr. Seitz responded they refer to them as non-resident tuition. This tuition is on a sliding scale based on the family's qualifications for free or reduced lunch. The tuition is \$1,000 for a student and \$500 for each additional child.

Supervisor Williams asked how much the county is responsible for regarding the Local Composite Index (LCI). Dr. Seitz responded that the county is responsible for 64%, and the state will pay 36%. The LCI has increased slightly from .6324 to .6389, giving the school an additional \$90,000 from the state. Supervisor Jessie asked how much LCI funds the county received from the state per student. Dr. Seitz responded \$6,200.

Dr. Seitz informed the board of the schools' budget request process, which starts in October. Dr. Seitz and Mrs. Murray meet individually with each principal and director to view each line item. She said that some positions will be eliminated or adjusted this year, and those changes are as follows.

- Two teaching positions at the Middlesex schools were eliminated, totaling \$175,000.
- A reading specialist has been added (the state requires this position).
- Three substitute teachers have been added, totaling \$77,000.
- The Carpentry position has been changed from part-time to full-time.
- A clinic support person has been added, totaling \$55,000.
 - This person will manage over 600 students within all the schools, be a substitute when a nurse is off, and attend field trips with students who have illnesses such as diabetes.

Chairman Don Harris asked when the board must decide on the school budget. Dr. Sietz responded by May 1st.

With no more questions or discussion, Chairman Don Harris asked the board if they would like to take a break. All members agreed.

BREAK

The board took a six-minute break at 10:15 a.m.

2. Sheriff Bushey addressed the board with the questions and concerns raised by the board, which are as follows.

- How will the SROs be deployed when school is not in session (summer)?
 - They will be on the road and fill in for other deputies when someone takes time off from work.
 - They attend SRO training between one and two weeks during the summer.
- Can you estimate, with some accuracy, how many manhours are spent handling calls at the campgrounds?

Sheriff Bushey stated that they are not able to track data by campgrounds, without modifying the CAD system, but because the campgrounds are open from April to the Oyster Festival, the change in total calls provides some guidance. Below are the call numbers from last year.

- In February, there were a total of 866 service calls.
- In March, there were a total of 1,000+ service calls.
- April through September, there were 1,500 to 1,600 service calls.
- October is the month when the calls start to decrease, with a total of 1,200 service calls.
- In November, there were a total of 1,200 service calls.
- Would that workload be significantly reduced if they hired private security?
 - Sheriff Bushey stated that the racetrack tried this approach, but the private security companies were expensive, and the racetrack did not want to spend that money. The other issue is that the security guards can only hold and contain until a deputy arrives; they cannot make an arrest. He stated that the campground tried hiring young

kids, and they were assaulted. So, this does not work. He said that Middlesex County has hired deputies from Essex County and other counties to cover the campgrounds, but they cannot always help. This is the reason that we are requesting two more deputies.

- Our Planning officials need assistance obtaining the necessary information to apply for charging documents. If you obtain the two additional positions, will that allow your office to assist with this information when needed?
 - Sheriff Bushey stated that he did not understand the questions. Supervisor Crittenden clarified the question by giving an example of the Planning Department needing additional information to charge a citizen; the sheriff's office would assist. Sheriff Bushey stated they have always assisted in the investigation when asked.
- Are there any other major factors - other than salary - that cause the manpower turnover in your office? (Do you conduct exit interviews?)
 - Sheriff Bushey stated that the number one cause is insurance, giving an example of an employee with a monthly gross income of \$3,500 and his insurance deduction of \$1,500. He added that they recently had two officers leave this month to serve at another area in the Peninsula and received a \$5,000 sign-on bonus, so he would like to increase the salary so that they will be making approximately \$52,000. He stated that the increase would not include the 3% COLA from the governor. Sheriff Bushey told the board that new hires would complete the following: required testing, such as polygraph, physical examination, and new uniforms, and be sent to a five-month academy, paid for by the county for \$20,000. And they do not stay long enough to go on the road.
 - Sheriff Bushey stated that during the exit interview, the number one reason was the cost of insurance or salary rate, and the number two a lack of places for rent.
- Which court cases require assistance from the Commonwealth Attorney (other than felonies), and which could be handled by the charging deputies?
 - Sheriff Bushey stated that the Commonwealth Attorney handles felony cases unless they involve jail time. He added that misdemeanors do not require the Commonwealth Attorney's assistance but it helps because they can be complex.

Sheriff Bushey stated that Mr. Hurd is trying to get an assistant and added that he does need help because some cases are difficult for the deputies to handle, such as aggravated assault felonies.

Supervisor Williams asked how many service calls the sheriff's office receives and where deputies physically go to the location. Sheriff Bushey answered about 10 to 15% of those calls could be handled over the phone, but they go to almost all the locations to avoid receiving complaint phone calls.

Chairman Don Harris asked if the four new vehicles requested would be leased. Sheriff Bushey responded yes, through a lease package.

There was some discussion regarding the assessment at the campground to ensure that the assessor was visiting those areas.

Chairman Don Harris asked Mrs. Lewis and Mr. Walker if they wanted to discuss anything with the board. Mrs. Lewis responded no but requested that guidance be provided on setting the meeting schedule agenda. Mr. Walker informed the board of a few updates, which are:

1. Mr. Walker informed the board that the lowest bid for the sheriff's office renovations cost was a little over \$3.3 million, not including the technology cost. The county will work with the PDC and has a new grant writer administrator, Claire, who will assist with grant funds for things such as generators at the new Sheriff's Office.

2. Mr. Walker informed the board that the final draft contract for the dredging should be available by the April 2 meeting.

Supervisor Bill Harris asked if this year's budget would include the sheriff's office renovation. Mr. Walker responded that it would be included in next fiscal year's debt service because it will have to be financed.

Supervisor Williams stated that he would like to find out about the demolition of the building at the new sheriff's office, which was previously discussed because it would result in a huge savings of \$300,000.

Mr. Walker told the board there would hopefully be more to report by the April 2 meeting.

3. Mr. Walker asked the board if they were ready to move forward with the budget or would like another work session. Mr. Walker asked the board for a consensus on the dates provided at the beginning of the meeting. The board unanimously agreed to the following dates:
 - work session on April 2, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.,
 - submit the advertisement for the proposed County budget public hearing, including the school Budget and proposed County tax rates, to Southside Sentinel on April 11, 2024,
 - the Board of Supervisors public hearing on the proposed County budget, including the School Budget and Tax Rates, at Historic Court House at 7 p.m. on Thursday, April 18, 2024,
 - Deliberation, revision (if any), and adoption of the County Budget, School Budgets, and Tax Rates 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 25, 2024,

ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn was made by Supervisor Jessie and seconded by Supervisor Bill Harris, and it was carried by the following roll call: Supervisor Bill Harris – Aye; Supervisor Crittenden – Aye; Supervisor Jessie – Aye; Supervisor Williams – Aye and Chairman Don Harris – Aye.

Don R. Harris, Chairman
Board of Supervisors