

Regular Meeting
October 6, 2003

The Chowan County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, October 6, 2003 at 6:00pm in the Commissioners Room, Courthouse.

Prior to the meeting, Commissioners were invited on a van tour of the County to view the storm damage caused by Hurricane Isabel.

Present: Jimmy Alligood, Louis Belfield, Ralph Cole, Jerry Downum, Wayne Goodwin, George Jones, Harry Lee Winslow.

Chairman Belfield called the meeting to order and Commissioner Winslow presented the invocation.

Consent Agenda

By motion of Commissioner Jones, the Consent Agenda, including the following budget amendments and tax releases and the minutes of the September meeting and the October emergency meeting, was approved.

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Budget Amendments

5321 DSS	decrease	\$418	decrease in LINKS funding
4263 Old Courthouse	increase	\$16,225	Edenton Historic Commission donation for furniture
63-4920 ECDC	increase	2,528	BMI payment Dept Commerce

Tax Releases

AB Dellinger	\$107.16	listed in Perquimans Co
D Lewis	164.17	listed in Wayne Co
P Malley	183.15	incorrect listing
Video Zone	998.02	incorrectly reported
PW Bennett	177.18	vehicle sold
HS Elliott	109.52	vehicle sold

Hurricane Isabel Reports

Since Monday, September 15 and daily since Hurricane Isabel on September 18, a group of County and Town employees, volunteer organizations and other agencies met to coordinate response and recovery efforts. Daily reports from the various areas of responsibility enabled a well organized effort which also allowed the public to be well informed. Two of the Emergency Management Coordinators who assisted at the Emergency Operations Center praised the efforts of the team. Staff Attorney Peter Rascoe served as Public Information Officer.

Sheriff's Dept

Sheriff Fred Spruill reported that generators were delivered to shelters prior to the storm. Other items reported included:

*when the Winfall tower went down from the winds, radio communications were lost.

*the Central Communications Center was evacuated to a mobile command center loaned by Catawba County, when water came up to building, but

not inside.

*one fatality took place when a resident in the Cape Colony community tried to leave her mobile home during the height of the storm. Trees were cut to get in and then back out in the effort to reach the victim.

*more than 70 officers from across the State assisted the Sheriff's Department during the emergency response to the storm.

*Jail inmates were moved to the State prison in Elizabeth City.

*the curfew controlled looting.

EMS Dept

EMS Coordinator Doug Belch commented on the successful working relationship between the County and Town to respond during and in the aftermath of the storm. He noted the formation of the control group on Monday prior to the storm on Thursday, activation of storm response on Wednesday and the declaration of a State of Emergency that day. Shelters were opened at Chowan Middle School and Holmes High School, with a pet-friendly shelter at the Recreation Department gym. Social Services operated the shelters with assistance from other agencies, registering more than 475 residents in the shelters. He noted the problems the State encountered with logistics to get supplies in and graciously recognized the National Guard for its assistance to the County and Town. Phone banks were operated by employees and community volunteers in cooperation with the Interfaith Group. FEMA has interviewed almost 3000 families and will be available at the Gardner Center (Old Armory) until November 17.

Water Dept

Water Department Director Ray Goodwin reported that even though the water tanks were filled prior to the storm and all other precautions taken, when the power went out, water service was lost. The generators ordered from the State did not arrive. On Sunday following the storm, the County was able to get a generator not being used from Perquimans County. Engineer Bill Diehl assisted the Water Dept in the service recovery, which was restored on Sunday and Monday.

Electrical Power Service

Through the mutual aid agreements in place, 130 linemen were quickly in the County to assist in the repair and replacement of service lines in the County and Town. Service started coming back up early in the week and except for homes too seriously damaged, service was restored county-wide before the end of the week.

Debris Removal

Staff Attorney Peter Rascoe assumed responsibility as the County/Town Public Information Officer for the storm recovery, and was instantly known for his radio shows on Beach 104 radio station, as the community listened for what became known as "The Peter Rascoe Show". Mr. Rascoe presented concise and helpful information to the public concerning the availability of ice, food and water and other health and safety information such as boiling water prior to use, curfew, and the burn ban. Mr. Rascoe described the setup of the operation center, including the setup of County finances to respond to community needs, computers, and phone communication.

Because FEMA did not arrive until September 27, Mr. Rascoe described the County's actions as "doing what we had to do" to provide for the health and safety of County residents.

Approximately 140,00 cubic yards of storm debris was moved by

emergency haulers and Chowan County now has a contract in place to provide for the removal of all storm debris with Carolina Landscaping from Liberty NC.

In this arrangement, the contract stipulates that Carolina Landscaping will make two passes on all roads in the County within the next thirty days. Negotiations continue with FEMA to address the non-system roads (private roads) in the County, as had been done in other storm areas in North Carolina. DOT is responsible to remove debris on highways 37, 17, 32 and 94.

The Albemarle Regional Health Services (health dept) supervised food vendors, solid waste issues, mosquito spraying, moisture concerns in flooded situations and other public health needs, especially assisting with the emergency solid waste needs in the County.

Communications

Data Processing Supervisor Phyllis Cranford reported that all County data and computer equipment and files were successfully protected. Mrs. Cranford and Joe Sliva installed equipment for the emergency operations center, the recovery centers and other storm recovery activities. Thirty additional phone lines were installed.

Property Damage Assessment

Tax Administrator Lynda Hendricks, with the assistance of the Planning and Building Inspections Office and four staff members from the City of Greenville, was able to develop an assessment of damage in the County. Estimated damage to property is placed at \$195 million. The Forestry Service estimates timber damage at 40%.

Business Assessment

Chamber of Commerce Director Richard Bunch worked with emergency management to develop a storm recovery plan for businesses a few years ago, which, he said, he was happy to report worked very well. Business damage is estimated at \$30 million and production losses estimated at \$10 million. He reported that in his conversations with business owners, most are cleaning up and going back to work but there is a possibility that two businesses will not recover.

Northern County Conditions

Mr. Bunch reported that the radio programs and the correspondences with church groups helped citizens stay in contact. The Center Hill Crossroads Fire Dept manned the station for five days and provided valuable services to the community, including some rescues, securing gas tanks and leaks, serving meals and working with the Red Cross at the station.

Farming Community

Cooperative Extension Chairman Mike Williams noted that Extension employees assisted residents with moisture concerns and saving furniture. He listed farm losses as follows:

peanuts 5-25%, depending on the weather in the coming days

cotton 30%

soybeans suffered minimal impact, possibly 5%

milo 50% loss

farm heritage (old buildings) suffered significant losses

forestry no direct aid except income tax adjustments.

Contractors and Building Inspections

Planner Elizabeth Bryant reported that the 15 temporary business licenses issued expired October 3 and that of the 200 registered contractors, 80% were from out of state.

Building Inspectors assisted with property damage assessments and then were busy with electrical service inspections as soon as repairs started.

Volunteer Assistance

Chowan County officials recognized the efforts of the Interfaith Disaster and Relief Effort, Inc., which is a faith based non-profit volunteer response to local disasters organization. Interfaith worked with the County and Town officials, coordinated by Clerk Nancy Morgan, from the beginning disaster preparedness stages and has provided services to residents in immediate response, early relief efforts, in long-term recovery and assistance in mitigation needs.

Director Dick Vail reported that more than 200 families without home insurance or other resources have received home repair assistance in more than 1200 volunteer man hours. He noted that more than thirty teams from across the State and country came to Chowan County to assist in relief/recovery services. Volunteer workers will continue to come to Chowan County to help with home repairs.

He also reported that he received a contact from the Governor's Office of an anonymous corporate donor who wishes to assist damaged churches in their recovery. Five churches in the County received substantial damage and those needs have been reported to the Governor's Office.

Dept of Social Services

DSS Director Ben Rose thanked the Interfaith Group for its support at the Recovery Center and also commended the DSS staff for its diligence in first operating the storm shelters for three days and then processing emergency food stamp distribution for five days.

He also expressed appreciation to the City of Greenville, Pitt County and Wilson County for the staff assistance in the recovery efforts.

The USDA withheld a decision on the emergency food stamps "way too long", but immediately after receiving word of the approval, distribution was scheduled with 2162 households receiving assistance valued at more than \$500,000.

Schools

Dr. Allen Smith reported to the County Manager property damage estimated at \$300,000 but nothing that prevented school resuming as soon as power was restored and the school properties cleaned up, on September 30.

Manager's Report

County Manager Cliff Copeland noted that the financial impact on the County is still not known. He commended Assistant Finance Officer Lisa Jones for her tremendous job coordinating funds for storm recovery. The County will have to pay costs of storm recovery up front, because approved FEMA reimbursements will not be available until a later date. The State has committed to pay the 25% local match to FEMA's 75%. Some of the costs are estimated as follows:

solid waste \$600,000 - \$1 million
overtime \$100,000 - \$150,000
equipment rental \$50,000
loss of interest income due to the County having to use invested funds
are estimated at \$200,000.

Mr. Copeland stated that we are thankful that the County has the resources to provide for citizens because many of the surrounding counties and towns are without the cash reserves to rent equipment or hire contractors.

College of the Albemarle has been temporarily relocated to the old walker School due to storm damage at the Lat Purser property (at the Food Lion shopping center) .

Mr. Copeland also discussed that the County will work with the State and Federal governments to examine the weaknesses identified in the disaster response, including such things as generator availability and communication failures.

He also reported that County facilities suffered major roof damages and water damage, especially at Swain Auditorium and the Old Walker School buildings. Mrs. Morgan and Maintenance Supervisor Don Evans are working with the County's insurance adjuster and a preliminary report of damages is expected soon.

Mr. Copeland expressed his appreciation to the Commissioners for their support of the staff in its efforts to provide services to the public during this storm recovery. He also thanked the department heads and their staffs for their work.

Presentation to the County Manager

In Commissioner Wayne Goodwin's presentation, he remembered his mother's saying about a silver lining in every cloud, and noted the cooperative efforts of people in the County, neighbor helping neighbor while being without power and water, and helping one another in cleanup efforts. He mentioned his granddaughter's impression of her father's destroyed farm shelter, when she said "We can fix it".

He expressed his appreciation to the County Manager and County staffs for their efforts to instill positive attitudes about recovery from the storm damages. He recognized Mr. Copeland's leadership as the force that expedited such a speedy response, and helped the County to be so well along in recovery just 18 days since the storm... power restored, water restored, roads open, and citizen needs being addressed wherever we can. All the Commissioners and the County Clerk stood in recognition of and appreciation to Mr. Copeland and presented a plaque in honor of his service.

Commissioner Alligood talked about his unique opportunity as a rescue squad member working during the storm to see how well organized the County staff provided service to the public during the County's response to the storm and the following recovery efforts, to provide information to the public and to expedite cleanup. He noted the problem with sightseers hindering work in some areas. He thanked the County Manager and the County staff for their long hours worked and dedication to do a good job for the public.

Public Comment

Jim Leggett expressed his appreciation to the County Manager and staff for the coordinated efforts to provide an amazing recovery.

Chairman Belfield thanked the staff "for going above and beyond the call of duty to see us through this disaster" and adjourned the meeting.

A reception in honor of Mr. Copeland followed.

Nancy B. Morgan, County Clerk