

Citizen Comments Received for May 3, 2021 Work Session

Comment 1: Barbara Jacobs

Received on May 2, 2021 at 11:38am via email

To the Durham County Commissioners

You all have a very important decision to make concerning who will be our county manager in the future. This needs to be a decision made by you and not by the residents of Durham. They, like me, may give input which should be considered. But the commissioners have been elected by the citizens of Durham, and they must make decisions in the best interests of Durham residents. The commissioners have a better perspective. They will know about personnel issues which are not public knowledge. They have seen the current County Manager's evaluations.

Race has been injected into this appointment. It is not about race. It is about good, responsible government and finding the best qualified candidate. There are many other important issues in Durham that are about race. Please do not use race as a smokescreen in order to ignore the items which should be given consideration for this employment agreement. I am very sorry this appointment has been so politicized. The residents of Durham deserve an outstanding county manager who is compensated at a reasonable rate.

I requested and obtained a copy of the 2016 five-year employment agreement which followed a 1-year agreement. The county commissioners have a fiduciary duty to the taxpayers of Durham to spend their tax dollars reasonably and wisely. This agreement does not seem to be an example of that. For example:

1. It should have an end date. As it is currently written, it automatically renews if nothing is done. It is good governance to review an agreement and not just do nothing, and let it automatically renew.
2. A five-year term is a very long time for this agreement. The employee can walk away at any time with no penalty. It would be extremely difficult to fire the employee without paying the employee five years of salary and benefits, I believe a shorter contract would be fairer to the taxpayers of Durham.
3. The agreement states "on the termination of this agreement for any reason whatsoever," and goes on to say that the employee will immediately be vested with health benefits, including medical and dental coverage as a Durham County retiree. Does this mean that if the employee resigns at any time that they are rewarded by being vested in medical benefits including retiree benefits?
4. All of the benefits should be in line with other Durham County employees including contributions to the Retirement System, contributions to the 401-K, and vacation days. The current agreement grants 7 weeks of paid vacation. The manager is also entitled to 13 paid holidays in 2021, a total of 48 paid days off. That is like working only 4 days a week.
5. The Manager is paid \$600 per month for use of a personal vehicle. Ignoring non-working vacation days and holidays, that is \$35 for every single working day.

I urge you to carry out your responsibilities. Please remember that the compensation is paid from the pockets of Durham taxpayers, and make it a reasonable package. The people of Durham deserve an outstanding person in this role, someone who is qualified, cooperative, transparent and understands that the county manager works for the benefit of every person in Durham, as do the commissioners.

Barbara Jacobs

Comment 2: Nicholas Graber-Grace
Received on May 2nd at 12:00pm via email

Good Morning Commissioners and Durham County staff. I hope each of you is well this morning. I am writing to urge each of you to work proactively with the Durham Board of Education to support the creation of fifty school nurse and school social worker positions within Durham Public Schools, as requested by the Durham Association of Educators. These positions are badly needed to support our students and have been needed since long before the pandemic. While we all wish that the General Assembly would fund these positions, we cannot entrust the health and wellness of our students to the likes of Phil Berger and Tim Moore.

I am confident that Durham County can work creatively with the school district to fund these positions -- perhaps relying on a combination of County and DPS federal COVID relief funds in the first couple of years as we scale up, with the County committing to sustain the positions in the long run once federal funds are expended. More than 800 people have signed the Durham Association of Educators petition calling for these petitions, and we will share those petition signatures and request individual meetings with each of you soon to discuss our shared goals and budget priorities. We look forward to working with each of you to meet the needs of our students, and to fully fund Durham Public Schools.

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