

**THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA**

Thursday, June 3, 2021

1:30 P.M. Virtual Budget Work Session

MINUTES

Place: Commissioners' Chambers, second floor, Durham County Government
Administrative Complex, 200 E. Main Street, Durham, NC

Present: Chair Brenda Howerton, Vice Chair Wendy Jacobs, and Commissioners Nida Allam, Nimasheena Burns, and Heidi Carter

Presiders: Chair Brenda Howerton

21-0378 Behavioral Health Infrastructure Discussion

Gudrun Parmer, Criminal Justice Resource Center Director, discussed the behavioral health infrastructure and current County investments.

Chair Howerton inquired as to whether the suggested next steps listed in the presentation included community input. Ms. Parmer confirmed community input aligned with the suggestions.

Vice Chair Jacobs noted the study focused specifically on the criminal justice system pipeline and diversions; she inquired how staff could capture other parts of the crisis response system and determine the gaps within it. Ann Oshel, System of Care Director, addressed the ways this could be done and noted that, while it was labor intensive, it provided good data. She stated that insurance status would also affect accessibility for people after the Transformation occurred.

Commissioner Burns asked about the role of the LME in mental health response in Durham. Ms. Oshel stated the commitment of the LME was to ensure that people who did not have the entitlement of Medicaid had the same access to services and supports as anyone else. She discussed the problematic nature of taking a passive approach and waiting for people in need to call instead of having more interpersonal outreach and education in the community regarding the services that existed. Ms. Oshel confirmed Alliance was entirely publicly funded through State, Medicaid, and local dollars.

Commissioner Carter voiced her support for continuing to populate and update the map at Intercept 0—which connected people who had mental and substance use disorders with services before they encountered the criminal justice system and enabled diversion to treatment before an arrest took place. She discussed the possibility of collaborating with the Sheriff and placing a freeze on a certain number of positions for armed law enforcement until a different crisis response model and infrastructure was etched out. The funds from those positions could then be reallocated according to duties for unarmed responders who had behavioral health specializations. This in turn could free up time (and possibly funding) for combating the rising

violent crime. Commissioner Carter asked the Board to look at increasing mental health funding and decreasing encounters with armed law enforcement through a different behavioral health crisis response system and asked if this could be accomplished through County staff collaborating with Sheriff.

Sheriff Birkhead voiced his support for a co-responder model but did not think it necessitated placing a hiring freeze on law enforcement positions and encouraged the Board to not get caught up in the rallies for defunding the police. He recommended using federal funding for this item. Commissioner Carter stated that she considered it freezing a position that was unfilled and filling it with a behavioral health specialist that would then not require a law enforcement responder—it would be a reorganization of duties rather than a defunding of police which would free up armed law enforcement to fight real crime.

Commissioner Burns spoke on the importance of doing the leg work, collaborating, and finding solutions without rushing through the issues at hand. She noted the three issues in Durham were the pandemic/economic downturn, gun violence, and racism.

Interim Manager Hager and Ms. Oshel discussed the necessity of doing intentional exploration to determine the best short-term and long-term goals, how to properly reach the target population, and how to scale up.

- Monica Toomer, Clerk to the Board, announced Admin I had lost power and, as a result, the meeting was no longer being broadcast live on the County website. The meeting was still being broadcast live on YouTube and staff would upload the YouTube recording to the County website as soon as the meeting ended.

21-0366 Minority Maternal Health Infrastructure & Next Steps

Joanne Pierce, General Manager; Rodney Jenkins, Public Health Director; and Hattie Wood, Director of Community Health and Nursing; provided the Board with information on maternal health disparities, specifically those related to Black maternal health and mortality rates.

Commissioner Burns discussed how Black women were systemically ignored and neglected in the health system due to racism regardless of socioeconomic status.

Vice Chair Jacobs discussed healthcare disparity data which showed 1/3 of babies born in 2015 received no prenatal care during the first trimester. She also noted the healthcare disparities that existed in the Latinx community and how important it was to address the barriers to healthcare as well as the bias within the system. Ms. Wood discussed the County's efforts to increase the rate of prenatal care provided to residents as well as Medicaid Transformation preparation.

21-0370 Durham Public Schools Discussion and Follow-Up

Keith Lane, Director of Budget and Management Services, and Interim County Manager Claudia Hager presented to the Board.

The requested DPS budget was \$19.92 million:

- \$1.9 million for the \$15 an hour raise for classified employees
- \$15.39 million for DPS operational increases

- \$2.63 million for Current Capital Increase.

The recommended DPS budget was \$10.128 million:

- \$1.9 million for the \$15 an hour raise for classified employees
- \$7,098,849 for DPS operational increases
- \$1.13 million for Current Capital Increase.

After requests for additional support, staff provided the following suggested increases to the DPS recommended budget which totaled \$14.128 million:

- \$1.1 million for Public Health School Nurses (10 FTEs hired and funded through the County), a Supervisor, and processing staff (2 FTEs)
- \$1.4 million in additional DPS operational funding
- \$1.5 million in additional Current Capital Increase

Mr. Lane discussed the DPS ESSR Funding (which included ARPA support) Proposal.

Commissioner Allam shared her appreciation with County staff for their efforts to close the gap between the DPS budget request and County recommendation. She inquired as to the salaries for the DPS nurses under Public Health. Mr. Lane stated that staff budgeted around \$67,000 per position, the range normally being between \$65,000 and \$70,000.

Discussion was held regarding the previous Public Health Director and General Manager's goals for school nurses. General Manager Deborah Craig-Ray confirmed there was a piece of legislation being considered that would put a nurse in every school and be funded by the State—there was, however, not much agreement between the House and Senate on the budget.

Commissioner Burns encouraged the Board to write letters to the Legislature advocating for the bill to fund school nurses with competitive salaries. Chair Howerton encouraged the Board to contact other Commissioners across the State so they could, in turn, contact their own representatives regarding the bill.

Vice Chair Jacobs was in support of the staff's proposal and inquired as to whether the DPS request for seven social workers would be considered. Interim Manager Hager discussed why the staff's proposal only included nurses and noted that the schools would be receiving federal funds and ARPA dollars. She added those funds could be used to fill the high priority needs that had not yet been addressed.

Vice Chair Jacobs voiced her commitment to the goal of having a school nurse at every DPS school. She wanted County and DPS staff to work together to achieve this within the next three years as well as add in social workers.

Commissioner Carter voiced her appreciation for staff's work on this and stated she believed it was possible to fully fund DPS's budget request via local and federal funds. She also supported the goal to phase in a social workers and nurses into every school.

21-0379 Board Final Directions and Funding Decisions

Interim Manager Hager and Mr. Lane reviewed the Add/Delete List. Mr. Lane emphasized the importance of recognizing that the fund balance could be used to fund needs and wants for one year, but many of those needs and wants were ongoing costs that would require staff to find ongoing supporting revenue sources (e.g. property tax growth, sales tax growth, property tax revenue from an increased property tax rate). Using the fund balance saved the County from having to do an additional tax rate increase, but it was necessary to find a different source of funding for the ongoing costs (which totaled almost \$3.7 million). He noted the County was also using \$3 million of debt service fund balance in the budget and staff was developing how that would not be available next year.

Interim Manager Hager noted the complexity of the budget and confirmed there was a probability that the County would need to raise taxes to cover the costs that were currently being covered by the fund balance. Even so, staff would work to reallocate and find funding to ensure proposing a tax increase would be the absolute last choice.

Discussion was held regarding the Master Aging Plan not being in the budget due to timing.

Commissioner Burns stated she would be emailing staff regarding the Black Chamber of Commerce.

Vice Chair Jacobs supported staff's proposal and appreciated their work. Regarding the funding of three positions for the Tax Deferral Program, she inquired as to whether those were all needed (since only one application was received) and if it was possible to shift them over to the Tax Grant Program. Interim Manager Hager stated that staff wanted to determine which workflow issues and patterns emerged before performing any recalibrations or realignments.

Commissioner Carter supported staff's proposal. She asked staff to work with Mike Dupree, Agribusiness & Environmental Services Manager, to get a reasonable number for BETC funding on the spreadsheet (there were currently three question marks instead of a dollar amount). Interim Manager Hager confirmed staff was working with the Soil & Water Conservation District on determining an amount. She stated staff would return to the Board in August with an appropriate figure.

David Ades, Assistant Director of Budget and Management Services, discussed a few last minute budget changes which did not affect the County's General Fund or the tax rate.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Tania De Los Santos
Administrative Assistant