

The Beaufort County Board of Commissioners met in joint session with the Beaufort County Board of Education on Tuesday, March 23, 2021 at 6:00 PM, in the boardroom located at 845 North Pierce Street in Washington, NC with the following present:

Board of Commissioners:

Chairman Frankie Waters
Vice-Chairman Jerry Langley
Commissioner Ed Booth
Commissioner Stan Deatherage
Commissioner John Rebholz
Commissioner Hood Richardson
Commissioner Randy Walker

Staff Present:

Brain Alligood, County Manager
Katie Mosher, Clerk to the Board
David Francisco, County Attorney
Anita Radcliffe, Chief Financial Officer

Board of Education:

Chairman Carolyn Walker
Vice-Chairman Michael Bilbro
Mr. T.W. Allen
Mrs. Eltha Booth
Mr. Terry Draper
Mr. Mac Hodges (via telephone)
Mr. Butch Oliver (via telephone)
Mrs. E.C. Peed
Mr. Terry Williams

School Staff Present:

Superintendent Matthew Cheeseman
Assistant Superintendent Mark Doane
Dr. Marvin Bradley, Chief Operating Officer
Lisa Duke, Administrative Assistant

Chairman Walker called the Board of Education to order, opened the meeting, and thanked everyone for coming.

Motion: TW Allen motioned to approve the agenda. Mr. Draper seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Walker said then turned the meeting over to Chairman Waters.

Chairman Waters said at this time I call the Commissioners special called meeting to order. He said the first item is the approval of the agenda.

Commissioner Richardson said I have a question, are we just going to discuss this. He said it's a wasted meeting if we're just going to discuss.

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Chairman Waters said that was the purpose when we were asked to have a joint meeting, for them to discuss the proposal. He said I don't see us taking any action tonight. He said we can have a special called meeting as early as Friday or Monday to take any action that we need to take.

Commissioner Richardson said I'm ready to take action. He said I'm going to vote for the agenda but as far as I'm concerned, it's a waste of time if we're not going to do something.

Chairman Waters said hopefully it's not going to be a waste of time.

Motion: Vice-Chairman Langley motioned to approve the agenda. Commissioner Rebholz seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Chairman Walker said at this time I'm going to turn this over to Superintendent Cheeseman.

Mr. Cheeseman thanked everyone for coming. He said the purpose of this meeting is to look at the next step the Beaufort County Schools will be taking in order to secure our schools and protect our employees and our students. He said just in a general review, as you know, last November of 2020 Sheriff Ernie Coleman sent a letter on Friday afternoon at 3:40 that indicated he was terminating the MOU with Beaufort County schools. He said specifically that letter was sent to all media, all school employees, including principals, assistant principals, and the Beaufort County Board of Education. He said I forwarded that letter to Manager Alligood, as I noticed the Board of Commissioners were not included. He said effectively the Sheriff met with myself, and Assistant Superintendent Mark Doane and in that meeting, specifically, he told us to seek an alternative for securing our schools. He said with that, the Board of Education charged me with putting together an RFP process which, through our attorney we structured that process, and the Board of Education came to a conclusion, specifically, to work with Allied Universal Security. He said in that process the Sheriff's Department did not apply and did not submit a proposal, of which we were told, they did not believe they could fulfill. He said so considering we're looking at working with Allied Universal Security and this evening we're specifically looking for your support in helping us fund that opportunity.

Commissioner Walker said Mr. Chairman I've got a question. He said Mr. Cheeseman, do you have the contract for Allied right now.

Mr. Cheeseman said yes sir, we received that this afternoon, today just after 3:00 PM from Steven Baker of Allied Universal. He said I do have copies with me to hand out to the Board, so I do have those in hand, and they've been sent to our attorney for review.

Commissioner Walker said Mr. Chairman I'm prepared to make a motion.

Motion: Commissioner Walker motioned that the County Commissioners Commit to an annual contribution of \$650,000 for the term of the contract to be solely used for contractual services between Beaufort County Schools and Allied Universal Security. This recommended contribution addresses the three-year contract between Beaufort County schools and Allied Universal Security and shall be reviewed upon the reconsideration of a future contract renewal. This contribution does not include the Beaufort County Schools grant funds that are applied to the contracted services. Commissioner Richardson seconded.

Commissioner John Rebholz said do you have any idea what that means in terms of costs to the County.

Commissioner Walker said yes.

Commissioner John Rebholz said that would be.

Commissioner Walker said it's a total of \$1.08 million.

Commissioner Rebholz said no, what does that mean to the County, the taxpayers.

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Commissioner Walker said the School Board, their contribution is \$400,000 something thousand through a grant so the \$650,000 is the part for the County.

Commissioner Rebholz said compared to what we're doing now, do you have any idea what we're doing now.

Commissioner Walker said it doesn't matter, I don't want to do what we're doing now, that's my motion.

Commissioner Rebholz said okay.

Commissioner Deatherage said are we doing anything now. He said we're just finishing up with the Sheriff.

Mr. Cheeseman said yes, the Sheriff's Department is currently honoring the contract. He said Chief Deputy Rose and I spoke about that, so they are continuing that until the end of June.

Commissioner Deatherage said all things considered equal, and there's a lot of moving pieces here, there always is in everything you do, but all things considered equal in a moving landscape, cost versus services and things you're concerned about on a regular basis, how do you feel about Allied Universal as opposed to what has been going on to what we're going to do now.

Mr. Cheeseman said specifically, Allied Universal Security, these are North Carolina Sworn law enforcement officers who are armed. He said this is not your mall cop, this is not a rent-a-cop, this is not security at a football game, these are law enforcement officers who have duties on the campuses. He said these are individuals who actually will give us a greater amount of protection in terms of time allotment. He said right now a deputy on our campus right now can be pulled away to other emergencies within the County, leaving us without law enforcement on campus, whereas this type of security provides 100% of our needs, meaning from the time we start to whatever time we end in that contract they will be there 100% of the time. He said these people will not be pulled away for other things. He said you have to remember, in terms of the law, there's no law that says you have to work with the Sheriff's Department, there's no law that says you have to work with the city police department. He said as a matter of fact there's no law that says which entity you need to work with but it's very important on behalf of our Board that we maintain a similar qualification and that qualification was that they're North Carolina sworn officers that are armed.

Commissioner Deatherage said should these officers, duly sworn, see any illicit activities going on or anything they suspect to be illegal and may have probable cause, can they search.

Mr. Cheeseman said they have arresting authority on campus.

Commissioner Richardson said are you satisfied with the contract that you referenced that you have, does it provide you with what you need in order to provide security in the school system.

Mr. Cheeseman said yes, at the capacity of 100% of what the contract says.

Vice-Chairman Langley said I just want to say this, I'm not going to interfere with anything that you all are trying to do but I'm just not in a position to vote for this on this evening. He said that's just my standpoint.

Chairman Waters said my thought was the purpose of this meeting was to have dialog and to talk about the contract and ask questions, it was not to make a decision on the funding part. He said so if we're forced to vote, which we have a motion and a second, I will oppose it based on that. He said this is just moving too fast. He said we can have a special called meeting on Friday or Monday to confirm the funding part but his motion that's now on the floor I will oppose because that's an increase from the amount of money that the County is currently spending. He said we are currently spending \$458,111 and if you take away the savings, which is entitled to come back to the taxpayers of Beaufort County of \$22,958, that's \$435,153. He said that's a completely separate transaction from vehicles because a question came up this afternoon, what do we do with our surplus vehicles that we're going to have so we're going to have to actually, based on our conversation this afternoon, we're going to have to have two transactions. He said one as it relates to cash funding and the other as it relates to vehicles.

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He said that's where we need some guidance from you guys on what, have you made a recommendation on vehicles yet. He said I was told nobody had made a recommendation or that had not been approved.

Mr. Cheeseman said on the vehicles being provided by Universal.

Chairman Waters said yes, whether you're going to do the contract.

Mr. Cheeseman said I presented the contract as shown on page 41 that I provided to the County Manager on Friday so I'm thinking that included cash funding to put that in. He said yes, that's 13 vehicles included in the contract.

Commissioner Richardson said what is this discussion. He said I haven't been involved in any discussions with this. He said I asked for a special meeting to be called before we met with the School board so we could discuss all of this and you refused so who are you meeting with.

Chairman Waters said I met with the County Manager and Chief Finance Officer to try to get some questions, in my mind, as it related to having a meeting tonight.

Commissioner Richardson said doesn't this Board function as a Board and not as an individual. He said are we back to King Chairman.

Chairman Waters said I think as Chairman I'm entitled to do that.

Commissioner Richardson said no you're not, you're entitled to meet with this Board for those discussions.

Chairman Waters said does anybody else have any discussion about the motion that's on the floor.

Commissioner Booth said I'm prepared to vote. He said the reason is I'm going to tell you why. He said I don't care who they hire, that's up to them. He said I don't think we need to be here, period. He said the only thing we need to worry about is funding.

Chairman Waters said right, which he's got a motion on the floor.

Commissioner Booth said and that's all. He said if they hire me, that's up to them and the thing about it is I'm like Commissioner Richardson, I've been hearing all over the County that we met, I haven't met with anybody. He said I haven't talked to a Commissioner other than Jerry Langley and Randy Walker since the last time we met. He said Commissioner Walker, he's been calling me every other day about this police stuff so if it comes up for a vote tonight I'm going to vote for it and get out of here. He said like I said, and I hate to say this baby, but if you tell me you're leaving and you leave me, you're out, nobody gonna come back. He said when somebody comes up and tells you that they're done, you can't ask them to come back. He said it's easier for them to leave you a second time and if this happened the way they said it happened, that they got the letter at 3:30, riding home, then that's it, I'm threw with it. He said the money is over as far as I'm concerned.

Chairman Waters said I think this is one of the most important decisions that I've had to face while being a County Commissioners. He said you've got to realize, I live in a remote area of this County, very remote. He said I don't live inside a city limit, so I don't have a backup law enforcement like you guys that live within the city limits. He said what it means to the citizens of this County is if something happens in Aurora in July or August at Southern Bank, guess what's going to happen, we're doing away with 13 sworn deputies that operated within this County 24-7, 365 days.

Commissioner Booth said no we're not.

Commissioner Richardson said Mr. Chairman I solidly disagree with what you're trying to say.

Chairman Waters said you're out of order, you're out of order, it's a fact.

Commissioner Richardson said where's the proof. He said you're distorting the facts.

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Chairman Waters said when something happens at Northeast Elementary or Northside, those people could move. He said we, we're going to lose that so when I get a call because of 911 and because of that I'm going to give them your number, that's what I'm going to do, because I'm not participating in this. He said this is wrong. He said I understand there's been a disagreement, but I want to make sure the 47,000 people in this County understand where we're headed.

Mr. Cheeseman said let me tell you about 47,000 people, let me just say it this way, we didn't ask to be put in this position.

Chairman Waters said I understand that.

Mr. Cheeseman said my job is to protect children and adults in the schools in this County and I get what you're saying but right now there is a sense of urgency to make sure that our children and adults in the community coming in and out of these schools are protected. He said I understand your concern about where you live but the one question you would never have to answer is why, why was the school not covered. He said at Columbine, and Sandyhook, at Parkland, you don't want that question either so with that I'm asking you to entertain what the Board of Education has already brought to the table and I believe there's a motion on the floor.

Commissioner Rebholz said I think we need to take a little bit of a breath. He said I'd like to cover, I need to cover with you where the finances are within the County and I think it's appropriate that you do that when we vote because I'm not privy to what you have Commissioner Walker, I don't have someone bringing that home to me.

Mr. Cheeseman said you were all privy to it in the sense that I sent it to your County Manager on Friday. He said you are privy to it, the County Manager sent it to you, so you have the same information that every County Commissioner has.

Mr. Alligood said they were sent the proposal, they got that, but they did not have the contract.

Mr. Cheeseman said the contract talks about the same finances as on page 41. He said there's nothing different. He said the contract just came today and we're asking about the funding.

Commissioner Rebholz said let me talk about the finance piece of it from the County standpoint. He said I just want us to be eyes wide open. He said the numbers that you're going to see here in some of this is in the packet, although you probably have to have some better specs on to see what was in the packet. He said some of the numbers have changed. He said the numbers that are the proposal are what we took from the original proposal. He said now, I don't know if that's what you got today or not because this is from the original proposal. He said the County spends out of its general fund \$458,111 per calendar year for the SRO's. He said you can see what that includes so when you initially may have seen this chart that was in the \$350,000 range but that did not include some of the benefits and some of the other items we did a deep dive into to find out exactly what was all attached to these positions. He said so as you can see right now, total funding for 13 SRO's that we're having in this budget is \$886,308. He said I think the proposal, without the vehicles, is \$863,000, which would be a savings of \$22,000. He said additional expenses, this is the vehicle side, the County spends \$101,000. He said I think the proposal calls for \$218,000 so the new total expenses are \$987,474 for the County in the current budget. He said initial proposal was \$108,000 so there's a \$94,000 increase in cost. He said does anybody, are these numbers right do you think.

Mr. Cheeseman said just seeing them right now sir, I'd have to go back and look at it. He said I can't say for certain.

Commissioner Rebholz said Commissioner Walker, isn't that the number you gave, the \$1.08 million.

Commissioner Walker said like I said, it doesn't matter because the Sheriff doesn't want to do this so why are we bothering.

Mr. Cheeseman said our number, based on the information I have you, is that \$1.08 million. He said all other things you're providing that's not under our directory so I can't confirm them.

Commissioner Rebholz said right, I'm just talking about the proposal.

Mr. Cheeseman said \$1,081,750.62 for 100% coverage of the schools.

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Commissioner Richardson said we're talking about money that was budgeted, is that right or are we talking about actual expense.

Commissioner Rebholz said no, this is budgeted money.

Chairman Waters said we're talking actuals.

Commissioner Richardson said okay, then there's some distortions in that because he hasn't been able to fill all of these positions. He said you actually have a lot more budgeted than what's shown up here.

Commissioner Rebholz said so right now the cost to provide the service may be a little less or may be a little more depending on the scope of the proposal and you got that, so it looks like it's a little bit higher than what we're spending right now.

Mr. Bilbro said I have a question for clarification if I can. He said Chairman Waters, what you're saying is you're concerned that you've got a Sheriff at a school that if something happens across the street that they can't walk over there. He said is that what you're saying.

Chairman Waters said I'm saying that school resource officers can be asked to leave the school and go to an accident or go to any kind of law enforcement that's in that community.

Mr. Bilbro said leaving the school. He said so what happens at the Martin County boarder, Craven County boarder, Hyde County boarder, they're going to do what Sheriff's do, they're going to go from the central location that they're at and go to the location and handle it. He said I think it's almost a luxury that you're going to say we have a school that has a sheriff in it is just going to go across the street and leave their manned post at a school to do that.

Chairman Waters said I take exception to that. He said if that was somebody having a heart attack and that's the first responder that could save that life. He said do you think this private firm is going to be there every minute of every day at every school that you've got.

Mr. Bilbro said I think there's accountability and honorship of quality, absolutely. He said better than what we've got, I can tell you that. He said that's why the Board is doing what it's doing and we're doing it at the, well, at the summons of the Sheriff. He said he sent us something that says he's done.

Chairman Waters said I hope that's the case but if you go to our courthouse you will catch one of those people asleep.

Mr. Cheeseman said "those people" sir.

Chairman Waters said not your people. He said I'm talking about one of the security people.

Mr. Cheeseman said that's not a very nice term to use.

Chairman Waters said I'm talking about at the courthouse. He said let's get back to the motion. He said it was \$600 – how much.

Commissioner Walker said \$650,000.

Chairman Waters said \$650,000. He said so you're increasing the County's expenditure from \$536,000 to \$650,000. He said that's the number, just to make sure everybody understands.

Commissioner Walker said is \$536,000 the budget number.

Chairman Richardson said it's the actual number.

Ms. Radcliffe said I developed that number Commissioner Richardson and we actually do have 13 SROs in positions currently and I used their current salaries and benefits, plus their uniform costs, cost of cell phones, workman's comp and their body cam's to come up with that number so it is a solid number.

Commissioner Richardson said but he hasn't had all those positions filled all year, he has lapsed salaries.

Ms. Radcliffe said I used the actual annual salary so it's a combination of actual and budgetary numbers.

Commissioner Richardson said is the budget numbers, well it can't be a combination of both. He said you're adding apples to oranges. He said it's either direct expenses or it's the budget numbers. He said that's all it can be.

Ms. Radcliffe said the salary is the direct expense for the salary and benefits, that is the budget number if it's filled and we're currently showing they're filled.

Commissioner Richardson said at the moment they're filled but he hasn't had them filled all year. He said I think we're messing with the numbers, if you want to know the truth. He said I think we actually budgeted more than this.

Commissioner Rebholz said this is calculated based on the budget when it comes to salaries.

Commissioner Richardson said no, it's either a budget number or it's an expense number. He said it can't be a mixture.

Chairman Waters said let me ask two specific questions as it relates to the contract. He said has anybody made sure that the grant money is available to this type police force.

Mr. Cheeseman said yes, it's available.

Chairman Waters said the other thing is has anybody done an estimate on overtime.

Mr. Cheeseman said we've been given the prices for overtime so yes.

Chairman Waters said I mean an estimate of what that might be, \$100,000, \$50,000.

Mr. Cheeseman said we don't have that right now. He said based on the pandemic and other factors we don't have that.

Commissioner Deatherage said I have one more question. He said is this a one-year contract.

Mr. Cheeseman said no sir, it's a three-year contract.

Commissioner Deatherage said do you think there's any way that you could work the overtime, what is that going to cost. He said work it in such a way that there is no overtime.

Mr. Cheeseman said we can contract with a different company. He said it does not have to be this company.

Commissioner Deatherage said so you can still negotiate what you might have with them.

Mr. Cheeseman said with this company the negotiation would be a reduction of services, it's not a negotiation on price.

Commissioner Richardson said the school, it's not like you go out and get on an investigation and you have to work an extra five hours because if you don't do it it's lost. He said the schools have set hours. He said you're overtime rate should be 5% or less. He said would that be reasonable.

Chairman Walker said we made sure that we could enter into an agreement with local law enforcement depending on if the activity is at Southside or Northeast or Snowden, that we could use, if we chose to, we could enter into an agreement with

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their local law enforcement to cover those events. She said we made sure. She said they were not only okay with that, but they encouraged that.

Commissioner Deatherage said of course if you allowed parents to conceal carry during those games you wouldn't need security.

Mr. Alligood said just real quick, is there any consideration about the vehicles. He said the reason I'm asking that question is, according to the contract you all have laid out, it's \$218,000 for 13 vehicles every year. He said \$218,000 every year. He said is there an opportunity for us to transfer existing vehicles that we have to you, so you don't have to pay \$218,000 every year of this contract.

Mr. Cheeseman said that's a question I can go back and ask them but specifically, Allied Universal has their own fleet. He said as a third-party company, if we owned the actual fleet and they're driving in our vehicles, who covers their insurance and liability. He said that's something I would steer away from, to be quite honest, and I'm not sure Allied Universal would want third party vehicles if they're not in direct ownership and control of them.

Ms. Radcliffe said could we lease them our vehicles.

Mr. Cheeseman said we can talk to them. He said I can't answer for them.

Chairman Waters said I want to make sure; I'm not voting against security in schools. He said I'm voting against the procedure of the way we're doing this tonight. He said it's more money than the County is currently spending. He said that's where my vote is and I want to make sure you understand that because I take it very seriously, the security part. He said that's our responsibility, to make sure nobody gets hurt.

Mr. Cheeseman said say that again.

Chairman Waters said to make sure nobody gets hurt.

Mr. Cheeseman said it's your responsibility and its mine.

Motion Restated: Commissioner Walker motioned that the County Commissioners Commit to an annual contribution of \$650,000 for the term of the contract to be solely used for contractual services between Beaufort County Schools and Allied Universal Security. This recommended contribution addresses the three-year contract between Beaufort County schools and Allied Universal Security and shall be reviewed upon the reconsideration of a future contract renewal. This contribution does not include the Beaufort County Schools grant funds that are applied to the contracted services. Commissioner Richardson seconded.

Yes Vote

Commissioner Booth
Commissioner Deatherage
Commissioner Richardson
Commissioner Walker

No Vote

Chairman Waters
Vice-Chairman Langley
Commissioner Rebholz

Commissioner Richardson said does the school board have anything else they want to do. He said as a courtesy to them I think we should ask them if they're ready to adjourn.

Chairman Walker said we may stay here a little bit longer but if you would like to adjourn, if your business is complete, any questions, I'm sure Mr. Cheeseman can answer them down the road. He said I do want to thank you all for coming tonight. She said I want to thank you all for considering this and voting to maintain the security of our children and employees. She said at the end of the day Allied did let us know under no circumstances were the going to seek people outside of our community. She said their goal, if the people are there to hire, is to hire within the County. She said so we're not trying to unemploy anybody. She said but our goal has to be to take care of our children.

Mr. Williams said before we leave, I wanted to say I have received emails, calls, texts, and messages of all kinds of manner. He said is there anybody here that is not very clear on why this is being done. He said the school board did not cancel the contract. He said the school board did not tell anybody to leave the schools. He said it all came from the Sheriff's Office and I have the letter. He said if you haven't read it, I'll be glad to let you read it, but the nonsense needs to stop in blaming the school board for this. He said this was not cause by us. He said it wasn't cause by you either. He said somehow, we got pulled into the middle of politics and it's just gotten off the charts in the ridiculous stuff being said out in the public and they need to understand, we have had, how many meetings since this started.

Mr. Allen said 17-plus.

Mr. Williams said how many of those have we talked about SRO's.

Mr. Allen said 17-plus.

Mr. Williams said plus tonight. He said how many times has the Sheriff come to us and asked to get back into the schools.

Mr. Allen said none.

Mr. Williams said exactly, so we're doing what we have to do. He said August is coming up very soon. He said we have no security in our schools at that point unless we do something and we're going to have thousands of students show up. He said I understand your chart with your dollars because that's what you're charged with. He said we're charged with maintaining safety for our students. He said we're only doing this because we have been forced to do this. He said completely forced to do this. He said I was in Charleston, S.C. at a ball game for my grandson when I got this out of the clear blue. He said no discussion whatsoever. He said so everybody pass the word, the school board didn't do this.

Chairman Waters said at least you got a copy of it. He said we didn't. He said I've got it now, but we didn't get it when you got it.

Commissioner Deatherage said I have one question before we go. He said are we going to meet again before budget. He said we're supposed to meet one time before. He said is this the last time we'll meet before budget.

Commissioner Richardson said no, this doesn't qualify.

Motion: Commissioner Langley motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Rebholz seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted by:

Kathleen Mosher, CMC, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board