

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF CAROLINE COUNTY
109 Market Street, Room 106, Denton, Maryland

WORK SESSION
February 4 , 2020

Present: President Larry C. Porter; Vice President Daniel J. Franklin; Commissioner Wilbur Levensood, Jr.; Jeremy Goldman, County Administrator; Sara Visintainer, Chief of Staff; and Jennifer Farina, Administrative Coordinator

The meeting began at 9:00 AM.

Topic 1: Employee Services Award Presentation—Ryan White, Director, Caroline County Public Works, introduced the Commissioners to Lee Blades, Roland Fitzgerald and James Geib. Mr. White stated that all three employees are dedicated to Caroline County and provide numerous services to facilities, roads, and maintenance to ensure employees, and citizens are happy. Mr. White presented each employee with a signed plaque as well as special gifts for their years of dedication.

Lee Blades was presented with a 30-year plaque, and Roland Fitzgerald, and James Geib, were both presented with 5-year plaques.

Sheriff Randy Bounds introduced two deputies who received service awards for 20 years and 5 years of service as Caroline County Sheriff's Deputies. Deputy Robert Nerpert received his 20-year plaque and Devon Flaig received his plaque for 5 years.

The Commissioners thanked all the employees for their years of service and commitment to the residents of Caroline County.

Topic 2: Item of Concern: Jim Phelps, Register of Wills, stated that he was speaking on behalf of the residents who live in the Choptank area near the Town of Preston. He stated that a couple of weeks ago locals were confused due to new signage going up on the road. He stated that the new stop sign has caused confusion and the locals have signed a petition requesting the Commissioners remove the sign, and work on a different alternative to the road safety issue. He stated that many locals feel the new stop signal was not warranted, and there was also insufficient communication or warning before the new sign was added.

The Commissioners stated that they understand the community has a reluctance to change, however, a new stop sign should not cause more accidents. All drivers should remain aware of their surroundings and pay attention to all signs whether they are old or new. The Commissioners stated that they had discussed the sign placement with their Department of Public Works and locals who had attended a meeting earlier in January, and they decided to change the location of the sign. They stated that a warning sign was put up a few weeks earlier to alert all drivers that a new sign would be added. They further stated that while they understand the preference of area residents, their highest priority is safety and the stop sign was added based on the recommendation of staff who is experienced in roadway safety.

Topic 3: Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB): Jeremy Goldman, County Administrator, stated that the OPEB Board met several times over the past several weeks to go over the best options to cover more of the cost of post-retirement health insurance. He stated that it was determined the current assumptions being used for the plan were incorrect, the committee met with the firm Bolton Partners to develop more accurate assumptions for the new actuarial work required. The new plan design and study assumptions were created and were attached to the Commissioners briefing.

The recommendation from the OPEB board is based on these new plan numbers and assumptions. The board recommends to the Commissioners the following changes in the Retiree Health Benefits payable through the OPEB Trust: increase the reimbursement for individual health insurance premiums to a maximum of \$1,000 per month for retirees below the age of 65; cover up to \$1,750 yearly for individual health insurance deductible through the county HRA plan for these retirees; shift the full cost of the Medicare supplements from the general fund to the OPEB Trust at their current rates (the forecasting model used 5% increase per year for these costs); and instruct the OPEB Board to complete a full evaluation of the plan including assumptions and retention effects 5 years after implementation of any significant changes.

Commissioner Franklin asked if these number reflected covering all current employees. Mr. Goldman stated that it reflects the assumption that about 25% of employees that would qualify for the retirement benefit overtime, which is a combination of length of service and age. The Finance and Tax Office staff both believe that estimated percentage is to low and should reflect a higher number for security.

The Commissioners asked if staff could draft a document with data from the surrounding counties to see how other jurisdictions are handling this topic, and to make sure Caroline County is being competitive enough for their employees.

Topic 3: Department of Emergency Services Update: Anna Sierra, Director, presented the Commissioners with a number of proposals for the following recommendations:

- **EMS Division Reorganization Proposal:** Ms. Sierra stated that she has met with each EMS shift individual to understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they perceived in the EMS Division as it currently stands. One of the primary areas for improvement identified across the shifts was a lack of career ladder available to the division. When EMS Chief Mark Fletcher joined the County in December, he also met with each shift and again the lack of career development and professional growth was articulated across the organization. Ms. Sierra proposed the County Commissioners approve the same organizational structure for EMS that currently exists in the Emergency Communications Division. Current employees will be grandfathered into the proposed structure and provided opportunities to obtain the identified credentials associated with each position.

The new structure has been designed specifically to favor years of service with Caroline County, but also to allow the EMS Division to recruit experienced paramedics by offering a standardized way of recognizing experience obtained outside of the system. In order to cover the costs of this reorganization, Ms. Sierra proposes reallocating the funding originally identified for the Sergeant positions (\$16,000/year). The proposed reorganization proposal will benefit the entire division by establishing a clear career path for all employees and will provide more than 60% of our EMS division with an pay increase based on their years of service. The Sergeant positions would only benefit four personnel in EMS. Furthermore, while the Sergeant positions was well-intentioned, it would not be a meaningful improvement to the organization because the individuals would still have been attached to a transport unit full time, and therefore unable to contribute to special projects, incident management/direction, or other tasks in a meaningful or consistent manner.

The Commissioners stated that the would workshop this change during the budget sessions, and they would also like the EMS team to present them with data from neighboring counties EMS divisions regarding career ladder, so they can understand where they stand on the Eastern Shore.

- **9-1-1 Fee Changes:** In 2019 the Maryland General Assembly passed, and the Governor subsequently signed into law, Carl Henn's law (SB339). The law went into effect July 1, 2019. Ms. Sierra was a member of the Commission to Advance Next Generation 9-1-1 that drafted and

supported the bill. The change in fee methodology has provided Caroline with an 84.5% increase in revenue – from \$37,042 to \$68,363. The County received the second highest increase in the state, second only to St. Mary's County. For FY20 the County will receive a total of approximately \$249,000 based on the FY20 1st quarter disbursement. For FY21, impact will depend on whether the Commissioners determine applying the additional local fee of \$0.75 per line is the appropriate pathway. We also need a legal opinion to determine whether or not we specifically need to wait for the FY20 audit results to increase the local fee, or whether we can raise the fee after the fourth quarter disbursement is received as we will easily demonstrate continued need. Original bill draft language specified the need to complete the FY audit, but the final adopted bill does not specify that requirement.

Ms. Sierra stated that her staff recommendations is to increase the fee at the earliest opportunity, in order to create the revenue necessary to move forward with providing the additional positions to staff the 911 Center at desired levels.

- **Training Officer Proposal:** Ms. Sierra stated that she would like to create a new position. She stated that the purpose of this additional position would be to establish a full-time training and public outreach officer to support the needs of the county emergency services system, including career and volunteer personnel.

Currently Caroline County does not have a single point of contact or individual responsible for developing, coordinating, or maintaining emergency services training. Each Division within the Department of Emergency Services is responsible for coordination of their own training, and each volunteer fire company coordinates training internally. Without a point person for emergency services training, efforts are often fragmented and are not reflective of systematic training needs.

Caroline County also does not have a single point of contact or individual responsible for coordinating public outreach efforts. Each Division within the Department of Emergency Services is responsible for coordinating public outreach efforts, and fire companies conduct public outreach on their own. As with training, public outreach efforts are often fragmented and not reflective of public outreach needs. In addition, public outreach opportunities are often missed out upon due to the lack of coordination among county departments.

Ms. Sierra stated that this position would be budget neutral and funds from the 9-1-1 Fees could be used. Other funds would come from the Basic Life Support Committee, which believes the Training Officer position should be a priority and would benefit both the volunteer and career service. The Commissioners stated that they would consider the proposal and provide a decision once a determination had been made regarding the 911 fee.

Topic 4: Commissioners Open Discussion:

Commissioner Levensgood stated that he has spend several days in Annapolis attending bill hearings

Commissioner Franklin stated that he has attended several events around the County. He stated that he feels the Commissioners and County staff have made the best decision regarding the stop sign at Choptank Road. He stated that drivers needs to continue to be alert and pay attention.

Commissioner Porter stated that he would like to have a more in-depth discussion with the Economic Development Committee regarding the Office of Tourism. He stated that he is not in favor of funding the office as it currently stands until new leadership is provided.

There being no further discussion the meeting ended at 11:33 a.m.



Jennifer M. Farina, Administrative Coordinator