

**TOWN OF BURGAW BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
BUDGET WORK SESSION**

DATE: April 26, 2022
TIME: 9:00 AM
PLACE: Historic Train Depot, 115 S. Dickerson Street
BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Olivia Dawson
Mayor Pro-tem Wilfred Robbins
Bill George, Vernon Harrell, James Malloy, Jan Dawson
STAFF PRESENT: James Gantt, Town Manager
Kristin J. Wells, Town Clerk
Wendy Pope, Finance Officer
Tiffany Byrd, Deputy Finance Officer
Andrea Correll, Planning Director
Jim Hock, Police Chief
Cody Suggs, Parks & Recreation Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Dawson at 9:00 AM and the invocation was led by Commissioner Malloy.

FY 22-23 Budget Discussion

Mr. Gantt gave an overview of the key points in the upcoming budget. Mr. Gantt spoke about sales tax and explained how the sales tax is distributed throughout the county. He also commented on the water and sewer fund and does not see any major changes this year.

Mr. Gantt reviewed some details within the enterprise fund. There was brief discussion regarding the Wallace sewer rate increase, as it is every year. Mr. Gantt commented on the stormwater drainage fee and that is bringing in around \$150k a year. He also advised the Public Works Director has requested a new street sweeper. Commissioner Harrell said he is not in favor of purchasing a new street sweeper; he said he would like for us to show the taxpayers we are spending money on projects. Mr. Gantt explained the street sweeping process within the Public Works department. Commissioner Dawson requested the street sweeper be used before cars start parking on the streets in the mornings. There were no comments in opposition of Commissioner Harrell's request not to purchase a street sweeper at this time.

Mr. Gantt reviewed details within the general fund. First, he spoke on a letter received from the Pender County Historical Society regarding some structure repairs needed on the museum. Mr. Gantt said the historical society is requesting \$44k from the town to help cover repair costs. They have also sent a request to the county. Commissioner Dawson said the town has given a small amount in the past. After some comments, Commissioner Dawson asked if it was possible the town help the Tourism Development Authority with some type of fundraiser to help the historical society raise funds for the repairs. Commissioner Robbins said he does not think the town can give \$44k, but maybe we can give a smaller amount. Commissioner Harrell said he agrees we need to give something, maybe \$5k. After some discussion, Mr. Gantt said he will look at the budget situation to see what can be done.

Mr. Gantt briefly reviewed the list of budget requests from the departments. He also commented there is a proposed 7% cost of living adjustment (COLA) increase included within the proposed budget. Commissioner Harrell said he feels a COLA is needed, but not in favor of 7%. He thinks inflation won't last forever, so he would be more inclined to go with a 4% increase. Commissioner Dawson said she believes the county is doing a 4% increase. Commissioner George said he has a feeling inflation will get worse, but will go along with 4%. Commissioner Malloy said he was looking at a 3.5% increase. Commissioner Harrell suggested we look at the situation half way through the budget year and address additional COLA increases in December 2022. Mr. Gantt said his major concern is possibly losing employees to other agencies that are giving higher increases. Commissioner Dawson said other organizations have higher tax bases than we do. Commissioner Robbins suggested a 3.75% increase. Commissioner Malloy wants to make sure we look at the salaries for the employees working in the field, such as the Public Works employees. He said he would support the 3.75% or the 4% if we address the salaries in Public Works. Mr. Gantt said he had

compared salaries for Public Works employees recently and our salaries were very comparable to other agencies. After some discussion, it was the consensus of the board to budget 3.75% increase effective at the beginning of the budget year, as well as a possible additional 2% more effective half-way through the year. The board will revisit the inflation situation in December.

There was further discussion regarding the Public Works employees' salaries. Commissioner Malloy would like the salaries for the laborer positions to be looked at. Commissioner George said we need to look at other employees' salaries too, such as firefighters and policemen.

BREAK 10:13 AM-10:21 AM

Mr. Gantt briefly reviewed the pay classification plan regarding the COLA increase. He said salary adjustments to the lower pay grades have effects on the whole organization in trying to make the grade levels balance. After much discussion, it was the consensus of the board to allow Mr. Gantt look at the lower grades and see if there is a solution to include in the budget.

Mr. Gantt went through the departmental budget items and had further discussion on items brought up by the board.

Chief Hock explained the justification for the request of a new detective position. He said this position would concentrate of narcotic investigations and the salary would be approximately \$49k. Commissioner Harrell asked how the health and wellness program is going in the Police Department. Chief Hock said it is going well and gave statistics from the program. Commissioner Malloy asked what the town has for mental health. Chief Hock explained we have this type of coverage through our health insurance.

Commissioner Harrell asked about the upfit costs to police vehicles and the vehicle leave program. Mr. Gantt explained the lease program and said that upfit costs are not included in the lease payments.

Commissioner Dawson asked about the part time Inspector position and how many hours are being worked. Tommy Garris, the current part time Inspector, worked 289 hours from July 1, 2021 to the most recent pay check. Mr. Gantt said this position has helped Mr. Hesse stay caught up with inspections in town.

Mr. Gantt briefly reviewed the budget requests from the Parks, Recreation & Tourism Department. Commissioner Dawson asked Mr. Suggs what are his top requests. Mr. Suggs said we need to look at making some water fountains ADA accessible. Mr. Suggs said the message boards at the parks are an added perk for advertising, but not a top priority. He said he feels the utility trailer request is a high priority for the department. Mr. Suggs also added the tables at Rotary Park need to be replaced due to damage by carpenter bees and drawings on the table. The windows at the Community House needs to be replaced, as well as some maintenance to the exterior of the museum end of the depot. Mr. Suggs said a keyless entry system would allow easier access for renters at the facilities. There are also landscaping needs at the depot.

There was brief discussion about the window repairs at the Community House. Commissioner Dawson said she is in favor of the utility trailer; it was the consensus of the board to include the utility trailer in the budget. Commissioner Harrell commented on the tables at the park. Mr. Suggs said the tables are sturdy and thinks we can wait another year or two. After some comments, Commissioner Harrell suggested we phase in the tables as needed; it was the consensus of the board to reduce the number of tables needed and phase them in as needed. There were comments on the message boards at the parks. Mr. Suggs said it is an outside display case for community flyers, town information, etc. Mayor Dawson said she likes the idea of the message boards. She said we are always trying to improve communication, so this would be a small cost project to keep the citizens informed. All were in favor of the message boards. There was discussion on ADA water fountains. It was decided to remove the fountain at Harrell Park since it does not work and shut off the one at Rotary Park. Mr. Suggs suggested we make the fountain at Hankins Park wheelchair accessible. Commissioner Harrell recommended we do minimal fixings for now.

Commissioner Robbins commented on the land use plan and the façade grant. Ms. Correll gave updated information on the current façade grant applicants. The board agreed to keep the façade grant within the budget. Ms. Correll spoke on the land use plan. After some comments, it was decided to include the land use plan update in next year's budget. Mr. Gantt said he would add to the CIP.

Mr. Gantt advised the board of the condition of the roof on the Town Hall building. After some discussion, the board agreed to include \$40k in the budget for roof repairs.

Mr. Gantt and Chief Hock spoke about the replacement of three vehicles in the Police Department. There was discussion regarding maintenance and the usual vehicle rotation schedule.

Mr. Gantt commented on the keyless entry system for the depot and said this expense could probably be absorbed in the current budget. He also said there are maintenance needs in the lower half of the depot. The board agreed to include the maintenance budget for the lower half of the depot, as well as \$5k towards gravel and landscaping.

The board agreed to include the usual replacement of the Fire Department personal protective equipment (PPE) in the budget. Mr. Gantt also said it is time to replace Chief Taylor's truck due to substantial equity in the vehicle. He said a new vehicle is already in the budget within the lease program. There was also discussion regarding the replacement of radios, which all need to be replaced by year 2025. It was agreed upon to include replacement of half of the radios in the upcoming budget.

There was discussion regarding the window repairs at the Community House. Since fixing them temporary, Mr. Suggs said they are all in pretty good shape and staff feels that major repairs can wait for now. It was agreed upon to hold off on the repairs for now.

Commissioner Robbins commented on the Beautification Committee that has recently been created. There was discussion regarding the budget for the committee. Commissioner Robbins proposed to include \$10k in the budget for the Beautification Committee; the board was in agreement with this. Mayor Dawson said we need to go ahead and work towards bench replacement and new trash cans downtown.

Commissioner Dawson commented on a salary increase for the Recreation Coordinator and Parks & Recreation Director. Mr. Suggs requested a salary increase of 6% for the coordinator position, which is included in the budget already. Commissioner Dawson said she would also like to see at least a 7% salary increase for Mr. Suggs. Commissioner Robbins and Harrell agreed with Commissioner Dawson. Mr. Gantt will include the salary increase in the upcoming budget.

After some discussion on how to pay for the additional budgeted items mentioned above, Mr. Gantt asked the board if they wanted to consider a property tax increase for the upcoming budget year. Mr. Gantt said over the past few years, property taxes were decreased by 4%. He said if we increase the tax rate by 4% this year, it would get us back to where we were a few years ago. Commissioner Robbins said he would think about doing 2% this year and another 2% next year if we are going to increase taxes. After discussion, the board agreed to increase the property tax rate by 4% which would be \$.48. Mr. Gantt said doing a 4% increase would leave a negative amount of approximately \$54k, which can be appropriated from fund balance to cover the costs of budgeted items.

Mr. Gantt commented on the personnel requests within the budget, which are from the Fire Department and Police Department. Commissioner Robbins said the two most important things in this town are police and fire protection. There was discussion regarding the current request to the county for an increase in the Pender Central Fire District tax. Ms. Pope said an increase in Pender Central Fire District tax and St. Helena's fire tax has been included in the budget. Mr. Gantt explained the schedule and number of employees for the Fire Department. There was discussion about the personnel needs in the Fire Department and Police Department. After some comments from the board, it was decided to include the new detective position in the budget.

Adjournment

Commissioner Dawson made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Harrell and carried by unanimous vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:07 PM.

Attest: _____
Kristin J. Wells, Town Clerk

G. Olivia Dawson, Mayor