



CountyLines

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Youths need interaction with local governments

As elected officials, we have a responsibility to make our communities a better place to live for future residents. We also have a responsibility to help develop and inspire the next generation of leaders to whom we will pass the baton and who will guide our communities once our terms are finished.



President's Perspective
by Mary Accor

Mary S. Accor

My presidential initiative for 2009-10 is to bring attention to issues that impact our youth and to highlight ways that counties can help foster positive attitudes about local government amongst our young adults.

Numerous surveys show that youth who are involved in civic issues at an early age are much more likely to be active, civic-minded citizens as they grow older. A recent survey by the Pew Charitable Trust showed that 59 percent of citizens between the ages of 18 and

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Merry Christmas
FROM THE
NCACC

The NCACC's Christmas tree, grown on an Avery County farm, is annually adorned with ornaments from North Carolina counties. The Board of Directors, Risk Management Pools Board of Trustees and NCACC staff would like to send their best wishes to our 100 N.C. counties and county partners this Christmas.



Counties slashed spending for 09-10

NCACC survey shows schools, personnel and capital projects bear brunt of budget rollbacks

By Rebecca Troutman
Intergovernmental Relations Director

Counties carved out nearly \$350 million in budgeted expenditures for 2009-10 and set county spending back to 2007-08 levels, according to the Association's annual budget and tax survey. All told, 88 counties reported a decrease in their adopted 2009-10 budgets compared with budgets from the previous fiscal year.

The widespread decreases are unprecedented in the NCACC's 20 years of tracking county budget trends. Counties – and the agencies supported by county budgets – responded to historic declines in revenues by cutting services, positions and expenditures.

The state's assumption of Medicaid costs may partially explain the decrease, but it is important to note that the state assumed similar Medicaid costs from counties during the 2008-09 fiscal year without an attendant drop in county budgets.

Reduced expenditures included school appropriations for current and capital expenses; personnel, salaries and benefits; and capital projects.

Of the 93 respondents who answered specific questions on what actions their counties took to curtail spending, 50 counties combined to eliminate nearly 1,000 positions, with 20 counties laying off 220 active employees. While many of the positions that were eliminated reflected the collapse of the housing construction market – planners, building inspectors and sanitarians – counties also made cuts in agencies with rising workloads, such as health and social services.

Sixteen counties implemented employee furloughs ranging from five to 12 days of unpaid leave. Not surprisingly, 73 counties reported a hiring freeze for vacant positions, while several counties

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Wayne mourns death of Atlas Price, 2005 Outstanding Commissioner

Former Commissioner Atlas Price Jr., who was active in the NCACC and NACo during his five terms on the Wayne County Board of Commissioners, died Dec. 1 after a short battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 79.

In 2005, Price was awarded the NCACC's Outstanding County Commissioner award for his tireless work on behalf of all of North Carolina's 100 counties, particularly for his efforts in protecting the state's military assets during the latest Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. Price served as co-chair of the Local Government Military Base Advisory Committee.

Before opting to not seek re-election in 2008, Price served as a member of the NCACC's Environment and Tax and Finance steering committees. He was a member of the NCACC Board of Directors as District 3 Director from 1995-97, and served on the Risk Management Pools Board of Trustees from 1998-2006.

He was also active with the National Association of Counties (NACo), serving on various committees and task forces.

"Atlas Price was a leader, a trainer, a teacher and a friend," said Board Chairman Jack Best. "He served Wayne



The late Atlas Price was presented a resolution of appreciation in 2005 from the NCACC Board of Directors for his leadership during the BRAC process.

County faithfully for 30 years and will be sorely missed."

Earlier this year Price was bestowed The Order of the Long Leaf Pine, presented to individuals who have a proven record of extraordinary service to the state, with the rank of "Ambassador Extraordinary."

Perspective

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29 have a favorable view of government, an increase of more than 9 percent since 2007. The percentage is significantly lower in older age groups.

There are lots of ways for county governments to engage youths. Lee County, in conjunction with the City of Sanford, started a Youth Council in 2007 to help youths become more aware of the services provided by local governments, and also to encourage students to consider a career in public service.

Wake County, in conjunction with the Wake County School System, started a program in 2005 to educate children about the importance of recycling. The "Feed the Bin" program helps students learn about the environment, personal responsibility and environmental stewardship while also letting them know that their county government is working to preserve our natural resources. The program has been so successful that it was recently recognized with the 2009 American Forest and Paper Association's Award for Paper Recycling in Schools.

As 2010 gets closer and closer, I urge all county commissioners to begin

thinking of programs and opportunities to educate the next generation of leaders about county government. The NCACC and the National Association of Counties offer two such opportunities.

April 2010 – designated by NACo as National County Government Month – is an excellent opportunity for counties to publicize the services and programs they offer to citizens and also to engage students. Many counties across North Carolina offer activities aimed at informing high school students about county government during this celebration.

In addition, the NCACC will announce the winners of its 2009 Outstanding County Program Awards in April. If your county has a program geared to our younger constituents that could easily be replicated by other counties, make sure you nominate this program for an OCPA. The awards program not only recognizes counties for their innovative programs, but also helps spread the word to other counties about these programs. Visit www.ncacc.org/awards/ocpa/about.html for more information on the program.

Each generation faces new challenges. Fortunately, each generation brings with it a new group of leaders to meet these challenges.

NCACC STAFF NOTES

General Counsel **Jim Blackburn** and Meeting Coordinator **Penny Cummings** both celebrated 25-year anniversaries with the NCACC on Dec. 3. ... **Donna Walker** has been promoted to Risk Services Specialist, a new position created as part of the Pools' transition to providing in-house claims services. Walker will help with oversight of the claims transition, and will work with all three pools – Group Benefits, Workers' Compensation and Liability & Property – on complex management and technical issues. ... The Risk Management Pools added two new employees Dec. 1: **Robert Perkins** as Health Network Development Specialist and **Alissa Willett** as Wellness Program Coordinator. In his new position, Perkins will oversee the development of the Carolina Access for Public Entities (CAPE) network. Willett will serve as a resource to members of the County Health Plan in the area of wellness and assist members in developing or enhancing



Robert Perkins



Alissa Willett

new and existing wellness programs. ... Risk Control Manager **Bob Caruth** presented on the NCACC's transit claims and experience at the N.C. DOT Community Transportation Conference in mid-November. ... Outreach Coordinator **Lisa Nolen** and Outreach Associate **Neil Emory** presented **Joyce Logan**, a Durham County Tax Division supervisor, with a prize package during the Nov. 23 meeting of the Board of Commissioners. Logan's name was drawn from the pool of 18 county officials who volunteered to help staff the NCACC's booth on county government during the 2009 N.C. State Fair.

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Budgets

Continued from page 1

cited other measures for reducing salary and benefits costs, including suspending 401(k) contributions, offering early retirement incentives, and shifting rising healthcare costs to employees.

Of the 92 counties that responded to the question, 58 reported delaying or eliminating capital projects – commonly jails and courthouses but including county government facilities and school renovations in general.

Other noteworthy items from the survey:

- Counties set specific budget reduction targets, ranging from 1 percent to 10 percent.

- Counties drew upon their fund balances to stave off tax increases and/or additional cuts. One county reported using as much as 25 percent of its available fund balance. All told, county fund balances will be depleted by nearly \$125 million this fiscal year. Counties also drew upon their capital reserve funds to help manage budget shortfalls.

Largely driving the reductions and fund balance depletions was a drop in county sales tax collections – nearly 10 percent from the 2008-09 fiscal year and another projected 4 percent for 2009-10. Sales taxes represent counties' second largest source of revenue, reflecting 16 percent of all general fund sources.

The revenue outlook isn't yet improving. While economists largely agree that the recession is officially over, job losses and employment worries continue to dampen consumer spending. Local government sales tax distributions credited to the 2009-10 fiscal year are roughly 10 percent below last year's distributions, which in turn were 3 percent below that of 2007-08.

While two months of reporting is not sufficient to establish a trend, the decline tracks closely with what is being reported by state fiscal analysts. In his most recent economic outlook, Barry Boardman, chief economist for the N.C. General Assembly, said the expected 4 percent decline in baseline sales tax growth year over year is closer to a 6 percent decline. Overall, the state is seeing an 11.7 percent decline in baseline sales tax collections for July through October.

Given the unexpected decline in sales tax collections, the state's budget projections are 1.5 percent below targeted revenues – or \$95 million below expectations. While the state's budgeted revenue forecast was predicated on continued revenue declines through 2009, the budget relies on gradual economic improvement in the first quarter of 2010 to maintain revenue projections.

The 2009-10 annual county budget and tax survey, along with surveys from as far back as 1998-99, is available online at www.ncacc.org/budtax.htm.

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Further review for tax reform

Tax reform discussions draw attention of NCACC committee

By **Rebecca Troutman**

Intergovernmental Relations Director

Members of the NCACC Tax and Finance Steering Committee engaged in a serious give-and-take regarding North Carolina's economy and underlying tax structure during their Nov. 17 meeting. Afterward, members visited the Legislative Office Building to hear discussions from a meeting of the Interim Joint Finance Committee on Tax Reform. NCACC President Elect and Wake County Commissioner Joe Bryan, who chairs the NCACC steering committee, briefly addressed the joint legislative committee.

Prior to the field trip, Barry Boardman, the General Assembly's chief economist, offered committee members an overview of legislative discussions to date on tax modernization. He emphasized that the tax restructuring conversation is not unique to North Carolina. A number of states are asking similar questions about their system of taxation: Is it functioning? Does it meet the state's budget needs? Does it grow? How volatile is it?

While the N.C. Senate looked at complete modernization during the 2009 long session, the House sought a more deliberative discussion centered on sales taxes. With a special provision permitting the Senate and House finance committees to meet outside of session to discuss tax modernization, the study committee began meeting in November.

According to Boardman, the joint finance committees laid the study's groundwork at their first meeting – consider taxing more services and investigate different tax structures. Compared to other states, North Carolina is at the lower end of taxing services, taxing roughly 30 of the 170 services available for taxation.

Boardman said he believes counties have a vantage point, since broadening



NCACC President Elect Joe Bryan of Wake County addressed the Interim Joint Finance Committee on Tax Reform on Nov. 17 and emphasized the collaborative partnership between the state and its counties. He asked that the county voice be included in tax restructuring efforts.

Photo by Jason King

To view PowerPoint presentations from the meeting, visit www.ncacc.org/committees/scmembers-tax.html.

the tax base would increase the local sales tax base as well. Asked for his prognosis for tax change, Boardman emphasized that he is an economic prognosticator, not a political one, but that the legislative discussions are happening for a reason.

Boardman also provided steering committee members with an economic outlook and forecast. He said most economists agree that the national and global economies are moving out of recession but he is concerned that North Carolina may be bouncing around at the bottom, describing the current state of the recovery as "the investment phase" – helping Wall Street, not Main Street.

As the economy emerges from recession, it takes a while for businesses to feel comfortable about hiring, Boardman added. He is closely monitoring temporary employment – one of the leading indicators for economic recovery – which appears to be improving. Build-

ing permits were also up, but with credit still tight, he said he is concerned about the commercial construction market. He also noted that economists are now discussing whether sales tax collections will ever recover to the pre-"Great Recession" period.

The steering committee also heard a presentation on the status of the bonding opportunities provided via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) from a representative of the State Treasurer's Office. Tim Romocki, director of the Debt Management Section with the State and Local Finance Division, provided a high-level overview of the current municipal bond market, ARRA's finance provisions, and market take of the new and expanded bonding mechanisms.

While banks are reluctant to lend money over longer terms and continue to be partial to general obligation debt, the Local Government Commission is seeing some movement in the "Build America Bonds" program, and private placements are on the upswing, according to Romocki. He said tax credit bonds are still limited due to banks' uncertainty regarding their profitability – now and in the future.

He said counties with successful "BAB" placement include Gaston for school construction, Brunswick for sewer infrastructure, and Catawba for hospital facilities. Catawba has also been successful at issuing one of the new Recovery Zone Economic Development Bonds on behalf of its community hospital.

Haywood County has directed some of its Recovery Zone Facility Bonding allocation to International Paper for new equipment.

Buncombe County was first to issue Qualified School Construction Bonds. More counties will seek approval during the LGC's December meeting.

The steering committee set its next meeting dates for Feb. 18 (10 a.m. – 2 p.m.) and May 20 (9 a.m. – 1 p.m.). Meetings will be held at the Albert Coates Local Government Center.

Good news for counties on budget litigation

The NCACC Public Education Steering Committee heard a recap of the 2009 session of the General Assembly and discussed budget cuts in education as well as other legislative issues during its Nov. 18 meeting in Raleigh.

General Counsel Jim Blackburn summarized two education-related lawsuits in which the Association has participated as a friend of the court.

In Beaufort County Board of Education v. Beaufort County Board of Commissioners, the county challenged the application of statutes prescribing procedures for resolving budget disputes involving boards of education and boards of commissioners. The Supreme Court announced its decision in late August.

While the court did not invalidate the statute, it did remand the case to the trial court and clarified required jury instructions in future cases. Specifically, future juries are to consider county policies and capacity, as well as state policy, on what educational services are considered part of a basic education. This clarification should help counties in future school budget litigation.

In a more recent case, Sugar Creek Charter School v. Nash County, et. al., the North Carolina Institute for Constitutional Law, on behalf of a number of charter school students and families, is seeking a judgment declaring unconstitutional the prohibition on spending state and local funds on charter school facilities. Defendants in the action include seven boards of county commissioners (in Nash, Edgecombe, Halifax, Union, Mecklenburg, Cleveland and Rutherford counties) as well as boards of education in those counties and the state. The Association is coordinating a joint defense for the county boards of commissioners. The case is currently in the very early stages of development.

The committee set its next meeting dates for Thursday, Feb. 11, and Wednesday, May 12. Each meeting will be held from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Albert Coates Local Government Center. In addition, members elected Perquimans County Commissioner Tammy Miller-White as committee vice chair. NCACC Second Vice President Kenneth Edge, a Cumberland County commissioner, chairs the committee.

For its next two meetings, committee members expressed interest in exploring several education issues including: what commissioners can do about achievement gaps, the effects of end-of-year testing, issues around safety in schools (e.g., gangs), and the effect of mental health reform on schools. Members also expressed a desire to hear a report on the annual school finance study compiled by the Public School Forum.



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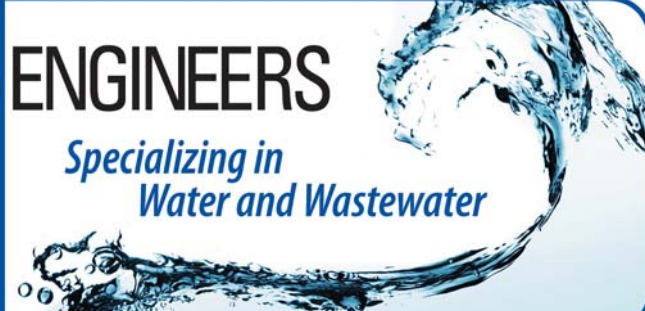


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Water regulation a fluid, yet sticky matter

Budgeting and permitting of state's water resources needed, expert says, but opposition will make for tough passage in General Assembly

By Jason King

Assistant Communications Director

North Carolina may not currently have a permitting system in place to address major consumers of water but that could change in the coming years, a School of Government professor told members of the NCACC Agriculture Steering Committee during their Nov. 20 meeting in Raleigh.

Richard Whisnant, one of the leaders of a two-year water allocation study that included recommendations presented to the Environmental Review Commission in January 2009, also said he does not think that any legislation that passes will look like what was introduced during the 2009 session. S907/H1101, the Water Resources Policy Act of 2009, is a comprehensive enactment of the study's recommendations other than river basin re-definition, which is addressed in H802/S833.

Whisnant said despite the perception among some in the agricultural community, the bills are not aimed at farmers. The bills exempt users of "less than 100,000 gallons in any single 24-hour period" from having to obtain a water withdrawal permit.

"If you are a big user of water, you need to be budgeted and permitted – even for your own protection," he said. A proper water monitoring and allocation system would protect current users if a large consumer of water taps into their water source.

Whisnant also said the agricultural community needs to become active in the water allocation discussion.

"Farmers are one of a relatively small number of groups that understand that water is something we cannot take for granted," he said.

While there's a natural human tendency to forget about the water supply when it's not a problem, Whisnant pointed out, the number of lawsuits and public disputes statewide over water has recently grown, thereby increasing the urgency for legislative action. Those disputes are only likely to grow in number with a significant population growth under way; the state is expected to grow over the next 20 years by more than 3 million from 2008 estimates.

Those factors – plus the potential for another water-sapping drought – could affect the timeframe of legislation, however Whisnant said that getting anything to pass the General Assembly is "not going to be easy and I don't think we have to rush into this."

Whisnant also addressed several misconceptions that surround the water allocation legislation, including concerns that the bills target private wells, that wells will be fitted with usage meters, and that the state will begin charging individuals for use. He reiterated that the bills would only require permitting for users who consume 100,000 gallons or more per day.

Cabarrus lends helping hand to local farmers, local food

Cabarrus County's efforts to help grow and nurture the next generation of farmers have so far been a success. County Cooperative Extension Director Debbie Bost told steering committee members that nine aspiring farmers participated in the county's first nine-week training program and actively farmed at the county-owned Elma C. Lomax Incubator Farm Park.

The 30-acre park, donated to the county by Ms. Lomax, is managed by Cabarrus Cooperative Extension. With startup funds provided by the Board of Commissioners and private grants, Cooperative Extension staff and program participants developed the soil and built a high tunnel greenhouse. Participants were taught not only how to grow crops, but how to take their product to market, how to understand insurance options, and how to handle taxes and other components of farming.

The farm initiative is part of a larger county focus on sustainability that was the subject of an article in the October issue of *CountyLines*.

County Manager John Day, a member of the Agriculture Steering Committee, said participant ages vary from 20s and 30s to late 50s. The group is pursu-

To view PowerPoint presentations from the meeting, visit www.ncacc.org/committees/scmembers-ag.html.

ing organic certification, he added.

The county is also moving forward with plans to build and open a meat processing center that will allow local meat farmers to have their beef cattle, goats and swine slaughtered within the county. Once operational, Bost said the facility should be able to process 25 head a day on the "kill floor." Bost said she receives more questions about progress at the facility than anything else.

In addition to the economic development benefits, the facility will significantly reduce farm-to-fork turnaround time and increase the nutritional value of the meat, according to Day.

The county also has initiatives to help consumers in shopping for nutritional foods and how to prepare locally grown foods.

More than 60,000 students in FFA programs

Josh Bledsoe, who serves as state agricultural education leader and state Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisor through Cooperative Extension at N.C. State University, provided steering

committee members with an overview of agricultural education efforts in public schools.

Bledsoe said FFA has programs in 286 high schools and middle schools statewide through 91 participating counties, reaching more than 60,000 enrolled students. He said teachers are allowed to make their own decisions on subject matter based on local agriculture capabilities. For example, Ashe County may focus its coursework on food processing (because of the cheese industry in the county) and Christmas tree farming, while Brunswick County may focus on aquaculture.

Bledsoe said that FFA works with the Department of Public Instruction and local agencies on which courses should be considered honors courses – an important consideration for students aspiring to go to college. Having agricultural education classes qualify for weighted credit obviously helps enrollment, Bledsoe said.

In addition to the presentations:

- Steering Committee Chairman Ray Jeffers of Person County appointed NCACC District 1 Director Phil Faison of Camden County as committee vice chair.

- Committee members set their next meeting date for Wednesday, Feb. 10, from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Albert Coates Local Government Center in the Board Room (second floor).

Answers. Later in the evening.

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Driver beware: Auto insurance isn't automatic

Don't assume your county auto insurance policy includes individual coverage for employees driving county-owned vehicles off the clock

Does your county automobile use policy let employees take county-owned vehicles home at the end of the workday? As the risk manager, how do you access and address the liability exposure of having employees driving county vehicles both on and off the job? What advice can you give your staff that helps put them in the best position should an accident occur that may not qualify as being "within the scope" of their regular employment duties?

Most county commercial auto insurance policies will provide coverage for the driver on an individual basis, with the key being "while used within the scope of their work or duties." The issue addressed here is what the employee can expect if the accident in question falls outside of their assigned duties and what, if anything, they can do to protect themselves in this potentially gray area.

It is important to note that the North Carolina standard personal automobile policy excludes liability and medical pay coverage arising out of the operation or use of a vehicle not owned by you but furnished to you on a regular basis (such as a county-owned vehicle). This means a county vehicle is not covered as an insured auto on an unendorsed North Carolina personal auto policy. Unfortunately, this also means should the employee be named in a lawsuit individually, and they are not on county business, it can get sticky, as it is then possible to potentially not have any

Managing Your Risk

by Michael Kelly
NCACC Risk Management

coverage available to that individual.

The solution is to have the personal lines insurance carrier endorse or amend the employee's personal family auto policy to add something called "Extended Non-Owned Auto Coverage" (Endorsement Form NC0306 Ed.7/80). This is an extremely important and relatively inexpensive personal lines endorsement that changes policy language so that vehicles not owned by you but furnished to you for regular use are covered for liability and medical payment coverage on an excess basis.

This provides a stop-gap measure that protects the employee individually regardless of the circumstances of an accident in a county-owned vehicle. It allows the employee to know that, on the job or not, there is available liability and medical pay coverage at a dollar limit at least as high as they carry on their own personal auto policy.

Normally public entity automobile use policy dictates no non-employee passengers are allowed to ride, with little or no allowance included for personal mileage. Additionally, the traditional risk manager's goal is to have after-hours driving – and thereby exposure – kept to a minimum. While this is certainly the suggested best practice, reality is such that at times it may be impossible for

staff to follow. For an additional relatively small cost of \$90 to \$100 per year, it is well worth the investment and individual peace of mind to have an employee routinely driving a county vehicle to be made aware of this available personal auto policy endorsement and give them the option of coverage.

Other suggested risk assessment steps are to examine your county's commercial automobile insurance policy and confirm that employees are in fact insured on an individual basis. If you are protected through the NCACC Liability & Property Pool, employees are automatically included. If you are insured via a "for profit" standard insurance company, employees may or may not automatically be covered, so take the time to review and, if handled through an agent or broker, ask them for clarification in writing.

A lack of coverage could result in a huge problem for one of your staff. Self insurance and one's willingness to take on and assume risk is fine as long as it was identified initially before the loss, otherwise you have no choice – and it can be a bitter pill to swallow.

Michael Kelly serves as Property and Casualty Program Specialist for the NCACC's Risk Management Pools. He writes a regular column on risk management for CountyLines.



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Pools give updates on claims transition, initiatives during regional meetings

Representatives from 62 counties attended the six NCACC Risk Management regional meetings held in November. Risk management staff presented and led discussions on several initiatives, including return to work programs, wellness initiatives, risk control services and training, and the Pools' newest service enhancement project, bringing property and casualty claims administration services in-house.

The Pools successfully transitioned risk control and underwriting services from an outside vendor to internal staff in January 2009, resulting in greater service to members and significant cost savings.

Building off that success, the Pools in January 2011 will begin providing internal claims management for the Workers' Compensation and Liability & Property pools. This change will allow each member to be serviced by a dedicated team of individuals (program specialist, underwriter, adjuster and risk control specialist) operating within the NCACC's core values and philosophy. By providing this service internally, the Pools will be able to exhibit greater control and responsiveness throughout the claims process.

One of the most positive ways to impact Workers' Compensation costs is by developing, implementing and managing a return to work program. During

the regional meetings, attendees heard presentations from area county staff – Henderson County's Yvonne Moebs, Forsyth County's Teresa Everhart and New Hanover County's Mike Winebar – regarding the success they have had with their own programs. NCACC staff is preparing a report to share with members that summarizes the great ideas generated during the work sessions.

Also during the regional meetings, staff focused on the rising costs of healthcare and societal behavioral changes that are contributing to those cost increases. The NCACC County Health Plan is strongly committed to wellness initiatives that seek to change consumer behavior, which in turn should lead to healthier, more productive employees and lower healthcare costs for employers. Attendees worked in small groups to discuss efforts being made in their individual counties and to identify the obstacles they face in implementing or maintaining wellness programs. The NCACC now employs a full-time wellness coordinator (Alissa Willett) who is available to members to develop individualized action plans.

The NCACC conducts regional meetings twice a year. The next series of meetings will be held in spring 2010. Contact the Pools at (919) 719-1100.

Wood knows ins and outs of State Auditor's Office

Longtime employee closely monitors stimulus funds, reviews county requests for bond sales as member of Local Government Commission

As one of its initiatives, the NCACC strategic goals team charged with "enhancing the state-county relationship through effective communication and the development of a working partnership" is interviewing members of Governor Beverly Perdue's Cabinet and Council of State. In late October, Meeting Coordinator Penny Cummings and Underwriter Willie Allen sat down with Beth Wood, who in November 2008 became the first woman elected to the position of State Auditor in North Carolina.

How does the Office of the State Auditor impact and interact with county government?

"Not directly as far as using the office for counties and cities, but it's more from a citizen's perspective. We are auditing state agencies, and all of the state agencies pass along federal and state grants. I think a big issue that is important is that we are auditing how state agencies are monitoring that money that they pass down to cities and counties. So making sure that state agencies have good monitoring programs in place for the grants that they pass down will certainly affect local governments. We want to make sure at the state agency level that the monies are being spent for the stated purpose and that the objectives of the program are accomplished. So we've been looking at that a lot closer, making sure that the monitoring programs are in place, that they are using or implementing them and that they are, in fact, effective.

"We are currently looking at the state agencies that are getting stimulus money, and of course the stimulus money is going down to the counties to a large part, and we are going to be looking again at the internal controls that the agencies have in place for how they get those monies out, making sure they are going to the right counties and the right people.

"I sit on the Local Government Commission, and we approve or reject a county's bid or application for trying to sell bonds to pay for projects. I'm looking at the information that I get from the Local Government Commission and staff and looking at: did the audit report for the county get accepted or rejected? Did it have findings in the audit report, and if so, what were the findings? I'm looking at their internal controls. I'm looking at whether there are management issues, as to how monies are being managed well at the local level. So I'm not rubber stamping every application to sell bonds to fund projects at the local level, specifically county school boards.



State Auditor Beth Wood grew up on her family's farm near Cove City in Craven County, where she said she gained perspective from making sacrifices and working hard to make ends meet. "If someone had told me 10 years ago I would ever run for office, I would have laughed in their face. I never wanted to be a politician," she said during the interview for this feature.

Photo by Jason King

"With cities and counties, I'm looking at whether they have a tradition of sound money management and controls, and even if they have, do they have issues in the audit reports of their central control? I'm looking for good stewards of a county's money. When they call me to borrow funds and I say 'no,' I'm basing that on the ability that county has to repay that debt, because certainly if counties can't repay their debt, the state will have to figure this out some way, so I really am trying to make the right decision with the information I have as opposed to being a rubber stamp."

How has your experience as a long-term staff member with the State Auditor's Office prepared you to lead the department, and what specific strengths do you bring to the role of State Auditor?

"I think the fact that I know how the office is supposed to run. I've been Assistant State Auditor Level 2, which is two positions down from a supervisor, and that's where I started out when I came in the door. I've also been in the training department the whole time. I was the Training Director for the past four years, so I've gotten to know all aspects of the office. I've been able to see the capacity of every person in this office – the managers, supervisors – so I have a great working relationship not with just one aspect of the office but all of the office. I knew this office inside and out before I ever ran for office. I think

the strength that I bring is that I do understand the office from the ground floor up. So you can't blow smoke up my skirt because, when you come to me, I have a working knowledge. I've audited counties. I've audit cities. I've audited large nonprofits, so I have a good grasp of government accounting and government auditing. And then coming from within the state, I know this office and what it is responsible for from the inside out.

"The strengths that I bring are that I'm not bashful and I'm not afraid to speak out. When I came to work, I only planned to be with state government probably for a couple of years. Here I am 11, 12 years later, still here. But I'm not bashful. I've never thought that I would retire from the state, so I've never been afraid of saying what I felt.

"I also react as more of a citizen than I do a state employee. I look at things from the perspective of the citizen. I look for what this office is doing, and we are not just an 8-to-5 job. We are auditing tax dollars that you and I, our parents, our friends, people we don't even know, are paying into the state. And we are the owners as taxpayers, and I feel the strength that I bring is that I'm always looking at it from the taxpayers' perspective, even though I've been here almost 12 years in state government.

"I am a CPA. I am only one of two that's ever been elected to this office, and this office has been in existence since the 1800s. I am the first female, but I think even more important than that is that I'm the first auditor to bring the culmination of the experience I've just explained. I do have my CPA. I do have city and county and not-for-profit audit experience. Then I went to the Local Government Commission to work where it was my responsibility to accept or reject the very same reports on behalf of North Carolina state agencies. And so I produced those reports, then I was on the other side accepting or rejecting them. Then I came into this office and I have trained this staff, I've trained in statistics, I've trained in sampling, I've trained in internal controls, how to audit federal grants,

so I have a real great working knowledge from all perspectives, practical, theoretical – and I do have a CPA license that I have to maintain. So I believe I bring the background and experience that no state auditor has ever brought.

"Nobody has to speak on my behalf about the audits that we do. When I go down to the General Assembly, when I speak to the governor, when I'm out talking to different groups, I can tell you what are the findings in our audit, and I can tell you the consequences of the findings. I am now going through all of our audit reports in meticulous detail because I want to make sure that, No. 1, they ask the right questions to ensure that nobody can punch holes in the findings of our audit. So I have such a great working knowledge of the audit and government that I can ask the right question to my staff auditors, managers and supervisors so that when they answer them and defend them to me, by the time the audit report gets out the door, it is as factual as this office has ever put out.

"It's not that I think my staff can't do it. It's a cold set of eyes, looking at something that they've been immersed in the details, but as a cold set of eyes but still with a great working knowledge of how this stuff is all supposed to be put together. When they tell me here's the audit, here's the objective, here's what we went and did, when I hear that information I can ask all the right questions so we've got all of our ducks in a row. Then when we are being attacked from the outside, nobody can find fault or fallacy or a hole in our audit, and I believe that's something this office has not always been responsive to."

What steps will your administration take to strengthen and improve the relationship between your agency and county government in North Carolina?

"I'd have to say that that is probably more from the perspective of getting out and about to the counties and speaking and letting them know what it is we do. I want them to understand my position.

Continued on page 7

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State Auditor

Continued from page 6

And when I sit on the Local Government Commission, when I reject an application to go out for bonds for a project, I want them to understand why it is we do that. I want them to understand how our audits here at the state level will affect them at the local level. We will ensure that state agencies are monitoring what they pass down. We will ensure that state agencies are giving them the information that they need to do their job better. So, all in all, I'd like to think that we are going to make state government more transparent, that we are going to be able to hold people accountable for the money that they pass down and then for the money that is spent at the local level.

"And what I hope to do is to be able to talk to the counties by attending your Association, by doing presentations, and then just on a county-by-county level to those who want to talk about the presentations that I make to help them understand what it is that we do, how we do it, and how we affect them, so that they will understand some of the citizens' concerns.

"I've been on the road speaking about some of the stimulus funds because there's very little information out there. I felt the need to get out there and talk about the stimulus money, and I know that there have been some county finance officers in on those presentations. In fact, the last one I did at the local level was

the county finance officers association. We talked for a couple of hours about the stimulus money, what information that I had they could use, Web sites, people that would be overseeing some of the things that they could do, who they could contact. I really worked hard to help push that information to the local level when it's not really my responsibility. I'm a citizen, and I felt the need."

How do you expect counties to interact and communicate with your administration?

"The way I would hope I would hear from counties ... if there are issues that they feel need to be looked into from a state auditor's perspective, looking at state agencies for audits, that the counties would feel comfortable in calling this office and telling us of their issues.

"Just something as simple as the FDA numbers not being identified when the federal money goes down from the state to the local level, the money's not being identified. Is it federal? Is it state? What are the requirements for this program? They didn't make it clear. So any information they can give us that we need to protect them from the state agencies, I would hope that they would, No. 1, understand what we do, and No. 2, by understanding that help us perform a better audit of the state agencies.

"I'm not sure that the county governments understand what the state auditor does and how it affects them because

we audit the state agencies that give them money. I'm not sure that they always understand that, so hopefully we can get this information out there so we can perform better audits of state agencies. Then again, when their auditors come in to audit them they will have the information that they need to administer the program correctly, to identify the program correctly to the auditor, to put together the schedule of expenditures of the federal award, that they will be able to do a better job, so that when their auditors come in, their findings will be low."

Now that you have transitioned into your new role, what additional information, materials or contacts would you like to have from counties or the NCACC to help with oversight of your programs?

"I haven't thought about if I had an issue that involves a county that I could go to the Association of County Commissioners and the finance officers that work through you, and so just having gone to the County Finance Officers Association conference and talking to their people there, I think I now have a better idea that if I need to get in touch with someone in county government that I can call your Association, say this is my issue, and you can direct me on who to call.

"All of the information that you have and that you can just reach out and touch a county within seconds, and that you have very good information on who's supposed to be doing what, who's good

in what areas and strengths – probably just the revitalization of this relationship and knowing that you all are there.

"I know having worked with the Local Government Commission that, usually, if we want something communicated, we usually do try to go through them, simply because they do the oversight, and I'd hate to do something that left them out of the loop."

At the end of your term, what criteria will you use to measure your success as state auditor?

"If I can stand back and say that the audits that we issued made the way the State of North Carolina does business better, if we are more efficient in the way we do business in North Carolina.

"If people take the findings in their audit and do something for the good of North Carolina that affects the citizens then I will say that my four years have been very successful. People may look back on my audits and say, you know what, that hurt when I had to read that, but you know what, everything she said is factual, and I can't argue with what was there, I believe then I can say my four years were successful.

"If state agencies are held accountable for how they treat taxpayer dollars both from the federal government and at the state level, if I can look at that and see a major difference in them being held accountable, I'll say my four years have been a success."

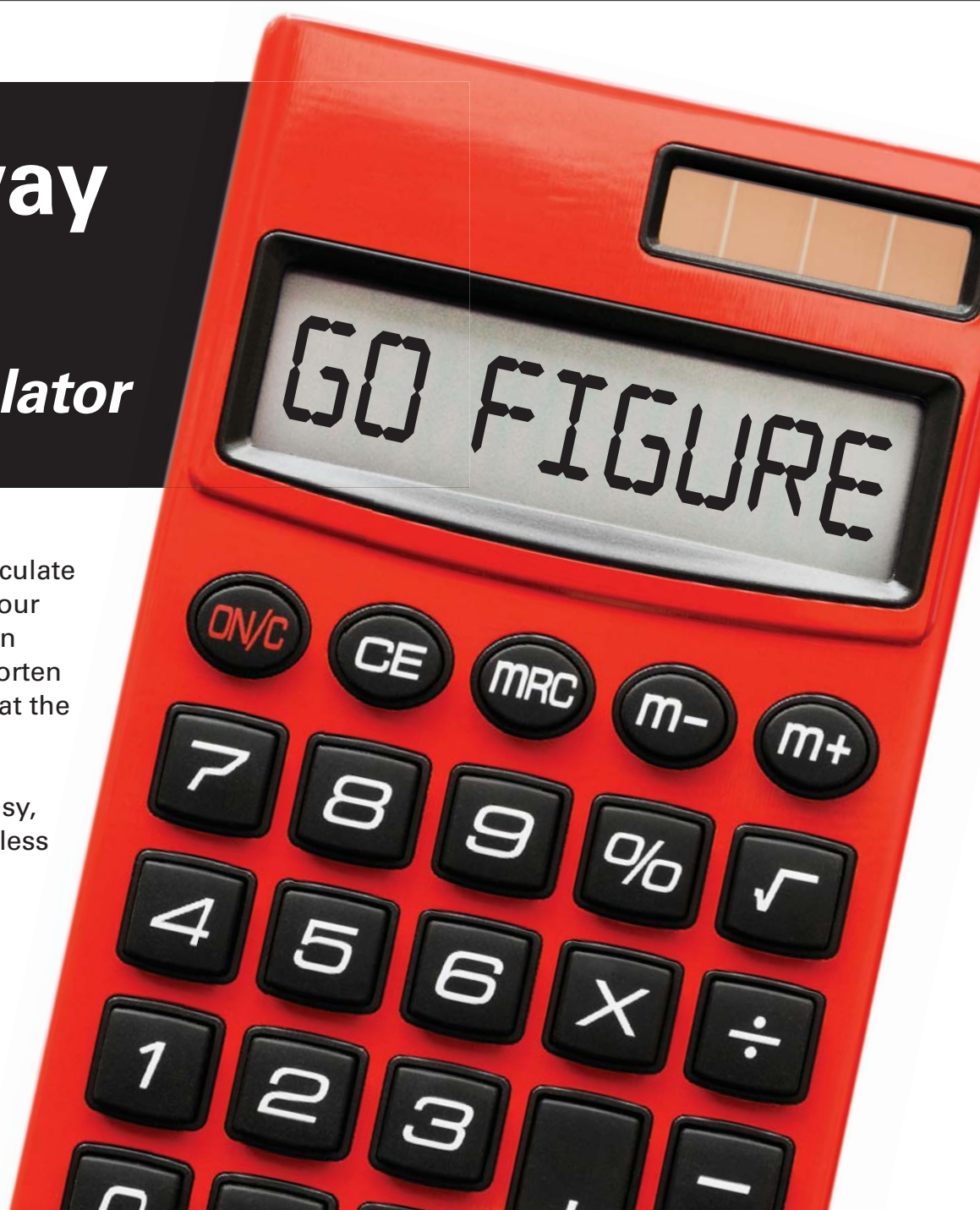
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PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTOR – Hertford County Board of Health seeks qualified applicants for the position of Public Health Authority Director. The Public Health Authority Director will serve as the Chief Executive Officer executing the powers and duties as defined in North Carolina general statutes 130A-41 and GS 130A-45.5s. The Board of Health is seeking an experienced executive and skilled healthcare professional that will be responsible for the management, implementation, and direction of the Health Authority. Medical doctor applicants will have responsibilities in the provision of clinical services. Preferred experience includes working with, developing, and fostering relationships with community health care agencies, hospitals, and providers. Qualified candidates should be able to demonstrate strong interpersonal skills and the ability to build constructive and effective relationships with a wide range of constituents on the local, state, and federal levels as well as with public health associations and community health groups. General knowledge of management principles, techniques, and practices. Thorough knowledge of the principles and practices of public health. Working knowledge of applicable federal and state laws, rules, and regulations. Demonstrates a passion for public health and upholds the public's trust through a collaborative style and approach. Strong leadership skills and solid ethical standards and political savvy are desirable. Must lead by example and direct employees in a manner that develops human potential and supports the values of the agency. A medical doctorate; or a master's degree in public health administration and at least one year of employment experience in health programs or health services; or a master's degree in a public health discipline other than public health administration and at least three years of employment experience in health programs or health services; or a master's degree in a field related to public health and at least three years of experience health programs or health services; or a bachelor's degree in public health administration or public administration and at least three years experience in health programs or health services. Note: Minimum requirements are in accordance with NCGS 130A-40. The Board would prefer a medical doctor or health director with at least three to five years of experience and is familiar with the Eastern North Carolina region. Salary: \$64,767 – \$95,474. Salary for a medical doctor will be negotiable. Interested candidates must submit a completed N.C. State application (PD-107) which can be obtained from our website at www.hertfordpublichealth.com, résumé and copy of transcript to: Wanda Vaughan, Human Resources, Hertford County Public Health Authority, PO Box 246, Winton, NC 27986-0246. Hertford County Public Health Authority is an EOE. Closing date: Open until filled.

ASSISTANT COUNTY MANAGER – Craven County. Craven County North Carolina, home of the historic City of New Bern, is located on the beautiful Neuse and Trent Rivers, with the Atlantic Ocean just 30 miles away. If you possess the extraordinary talent and leadership qualities to assist the County Manager in the overall administration of county government, we may be looking for you. The ideal candidate must have: Thorough knowledge of all aspects of county government operations, including administering construction projects, negotiating contracts, and overseeing work of contractors; also coordinating and appraising activities of department heads. Thorough knowledge of N.C. General Statutes pertaining to the administration of County government. Ability to perform administrative tasks for meetings of various boards and commissions; ability to serve as a representative of the County on local, regional and state boards and commissions. Work also involves serving as a member of the County Manager's Management Team. The knowledge and ability to assume duties and responsibilities of the County Manager in his absence. Bachelor's degree in public administration, business administration or a related field; five years of progressively responsible experience in the administration and management of local government programs; or any equivalent combination of training and experience which provides the required knowledge, skills and abilities. Salary range is \$91,553 – \$184,979, with excellent fringe benefits. Successful applicant will be required to reside in Craven County. Send N.C. State Application Form (PD 107) and résumé in strictest confidence to: Craven County Human Resources, 406 Craven Street, New Bern, North Carolina 28560 or apply through Employment Security Commission of North Carolina. Position open until filled. Craven County Government is an EEO/AA Employer.

SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR I – The Union County Department of Social Services, Division of Family and Children Services administers 20 complex programs through a staff of 72 employees. Two programs operate on a 24-hour a day, 365-day a year basis. Responsibilities include: Monitoring children's services contracts; Reviewing diagnostic and referral activity; Supervising and coordinating numerous service teams, Acting as liaison between the director and divisional staff regarding policies, procedures and general program administration; Establishes and maintains effective reciprocal work relationships with other agencies. This position requires a comprehensive working knowledge of public social services systems within child welfare, experience in personnel administration, program planning, community collaboration, and fiscal management. Requires Master's degree from an accredited school of social work and four years of social work or counseling experience, two of which are supervisory; or bachelor's degree in social work and five years of social work or counseling experience, two of which were supervisory; or bachelor's degree in a human services field or related curriculum including at least 15 semester hours in courses related to social work or counseling and six years of social work or counseling experience, two of which were supervisory; or an equivalent combination of training and experience. Apply online at www.co.union.nc.us.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Piedmont Triad Council of Governments. The Piedmont Triad Council of Governments (PTCOG) is seeking qualified candidates for the position of Executive Director. The PTCOG, located in Greensboro, NC, serves the seven North Carolina counties of Alamance, Caswell, Davidson, Guilford, Montgomery, Randolph, and Rockingham and their 39 municipalities. The PTCOG employs a staff of 21 people with an annual operating budget of \$2.5 million. Candidates must possess outstanding inter-personal and communication skills with strong financial management and budgeting experience. The ideal candidate must also possess the leadership skills necessary to envision and lead the organization into the future. Candidates must hold an undergraduate degree in a field related to the work and an advanced degree at the masters level or higher in public administration, planning, business administration or related field. Ten or more years of experience working in local or regional government or a related organization is required. The salary range is \$91,414 to \$146,262 with the hiring rate dependent upon experience and qualifications. Interested individuals should submit a letter of interest, résumé, salary history and three references to The Honorable Darrell Frye, Chair, PTCOG Executive Director Search Committee, P.O. Box 1909, High Point, NC 27261. Deadline for submission of applications is January 15, 2010.

LIBRARY DIRECTOR – Warren County Government is seeking qualified applicants for the position of Library Director. The position is responsible for the administration, management and operations of County library, including circulation services, reference/research services, technical service, technological development and operations. Provides supervision, guidance and direction to staff. Develops and recommends library policies and procedures; prepares and administers departmental budget; and represents and promotes library to the public, civic organizations, educational groups and county administration. Requires ALA accredited MLS degree or MLS degree from a NC regionally accredited library school. Must have NC Public Librarian certification or be eligible for certification before appointment. Additional information on certification can be obtained from statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/ld/plcert/plcert1.html. Must have at least three years experience in library management, including supervisory experience. Great networking and written and oral communication skills necessary. Must have a working knowledge of county or municipal government organization. Experience serving a diverse clientele required. Grant writing experience preferred. Salary commensurate with experience. Applications will be accepted until filled at the Employment Security Commission, 309 N. Main Street, Room 123, Warrenton, NC 27589. Applications are available at www.warrencountync.com. Warren County is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT ANALYST – Forsyth County is seeking a professional to perform work in the review, preparation, and administration of the County's \$394 million dollar operating and capital improvement budgets. You will be an integral part of the Office of Budget and Management, which continuously evaluates all aspects of Forsyth County Government. You will take on the never ending challenge of recommending limited resources against many legitimate requests. The ability to work with numbers and interact with people is critical to this position, as well as is the true desire and willingness to understand needs of assigned departments and functions and effectively communicate the conclusions to the affected departments and management. The person in this position is expected to be able to work independently and in a team setting and provide thorough and thoughtful analyses. Preferred candidates will have experience in integrating strategic planning and budget planning processes and long-range operating & capital budget planning. Proficiency in Microsoft office products, statistical software, and other computer related skills preferred. Masters degree preferred. Please apply online at www.forsyth.cc.

TAX COLLECTOR – Hertford County is seeking qualified applicants for the position of a Tax Collector. The individual will be responsible for the planning, directing and supervision of the collection of real and personal property taxes in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. The Tax Collector will employ, direct and supervise assigned staff. Must have comprehensive knowledge of tax collections and property tax laws and knowledge of governmental accounting procedures and fiscal management. Education and experience equivalent to graduation from an accredited college with major in accounting or related field and 6 years experience in collections and dealing with the public. Must possess a valid North Carolina driver's license and ability to acquire the North Carolina Fundamental of Property Tax Collection Certification within two years of employment. Must be Bondable. Salary Range: \$40,046 – \$62,072. Applications will be accepted until filled at the NC Employment Security Commission, 109 Community College Road, Ahoskie, N.C. 27910. Hertford County is an Equal Opportunity Employer/AA.

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CountyLines rates (monthly)

\$1.50 per printed line (minimum of \$25 per monthly ad) for North Carolina member counties and county entities; \$3.50 per printed line (minimum \$75) for all others.

Web site rates (one-time charge)

\$20 per ad (up to 400 words) for N.C. counties and county entities; \$50 per ad for all others. After 400 words, all ads will cost an additional \$5 per every 50 words.

General information and instructions

Ads published in CountyLines run in one issue only unless otherwise requested by the advertiser. Ads published in CountyLines are posted online at no additional charge and will remain posted on the Web site until the position's closing date or the position is filled, for up to six months. Advertisers are asked to notify the NCACC when their position has been filled. Ads may be submitted, along with billing information, to Jason King via e-mail (communications@ncacc.org), or faxed to (919) 733-1065. Non-N.C. member counties must provide a credit card number before ads will be posted. **The deadline for advertising in the next issue of CountyLines is Tuesday, Jan. 5.** For more information, please call Jason King at (919) 715-0045.

Calendar of Events

For a complete listing of events, visit www.ncacc.org/meetings.htm.

▼ JANUARY

13 Regional LeaderShop: Local Finance - Making Sense of Annual Financial Statements, Hilton Wilmington Riverside

29 Regional LeaderShop: Local Finance - Making Sense of Annual Financial Statements, Embassy Suites Charlotte-Concord

▼ FEBRUARY

3 NCACC Board of Directors meeting, Quorum Center, Raleigh

3-5 N.C. City & County Management Association Winter Conference, Sheraton RTP

8-9 Institute for Emerging Issues Forum: Creativity Inc., Raleigh Convention Center

9 NCACC Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee meeting, Albert Coates Local Government Center (ACLGC), Raleigh

10 NCACC Agriculture Steering Committee meeting, ACLGC, Raleigh

10 NCACC Environment Steering Committee meeting, ACLGC, Raleigh

11 NCACC Human Services Steering Committee meeting, ACLGC, Raleigh

11 NCACC Public Education Steering Committee meeting, ACLGC, Raleigh

12-13 N.C. Association of County Attorneys Winter Conference, School of Government, UNC-Chapel Hill

17 Regional LeaderShop: Local Finance - Making Sense of Annual Financial Statements, Hilton Greenville

18 NCACC Taxation and Finance Steering Committee meeting, ACLGC, Raleigh

23 NCACC Intergovernmental Relations Steering Committee meeting, ACLGC, Raleigh

24 Regional LeaderShop: Local Finance - Making Sense of Annual Financial Statements, Doubletree Hotel Biltmore/Asheville



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State mental health cuts trickling down to locals

By Rebecca Troutman

Intergovernmental Relations Director

It came as no surprise that the Nov. 19 meeting of the NCACC Human Services Steering Committee largely centered on mental health reform and the state's efforts to right a derailed system.

Mike Watson, recently appointed assistant secretary for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services, spoke to the many challenges facing the mental health system, particularly with regard to the hundreds of millions in state funding cuts enacted in the state budget.

Watson cautioned committee members that communities will see a cumulative effect of these cuts, with state service dollars reduced, Medicaid rates cut and Medicaid services curtailed. Local Management Entities (LMEs) were necessarily capping some services and closing down others.

To manage service dollar reductions while minimizing direct services impacts, Watson outlined the steps his division took to have LMEs report on how the cuts would be made in the community. First and foremost, LMEs were directed to protect crisis and core services. LME fund balances were also put on the line, with the local agencies "volunteering" \$24 million in undesignated fund balances to offset the state's \$40 million in cuts.

Watson also addressed the issue

of how involuntary commitments are impacting sheriff's deputies and hospital emergency departments. He noted that the Sheriff's Association and the Hospital Association were meeting with division staff to help stakeholders understand why involuntarily committed patients are occasionally languishing in emergency rooms. Is it a matter of communication or a problem with placement opportunities?

Watson said he believes that the state's mobile crisis teams should help curtail involuntary commitments, while the department's principal initiative to expand community beds would help with placements.

Several steering committee members expressed concern with the contraction of community support services, the much-maligned service category that drove state and county Medicaid costs when implemented. While the General Assembly is requiring the phaseout of community support, given its serious problems with quality and medical necessity, the division is responding by seeking federal approval of replacement services provided through a clinical framework.

To help in the transition, the division is putting into place a comprehensive provider concept, whereby a qualified provider would have to ensure an array of services, be nationally accredited, have a physician at the top of the organization with his or her license on the line, have a clinical director, have a quality

management program, and have a staff training program. During the shift from single-service providers to the comprehensive provider, Watson did acknowledge that small providers would be put out of business and that there would be access problems initially.

DHHS Deputy Secretary Maria Spaulding addressed the steering committee on several topics, including transition strategies for child support enforcement, caseload increases – particularly in food stamps and Medicaid – and statewide implementation of the Work First program's "Pay for Performance" initiative, whereby Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) clients must fulfill certain work and/or education requirements prior to receiving benefits.

Wilson County was the first county to experiment with "Pay for Performance" and won an LGFCU Employee Productivity Award from the NCACC for successful implementation.

Spaulding also reviewed the Division of Child Development's methodology for distributing the governor's 5 percent budget reduction target: \$12 million in child care subsidies will be held back via reversions from under-spending counties. She did share some good news: the child care Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards will roll out next summer, reducing administrative expenses and the potential for fraudulent activities.

With regard to aging, Spaulding said DHHS is working on a proposal

to the governor to endorse a campaign to increase state readiness for North Carolina's aging population.

Paul Beddoe, NACo's health policy legislative staff, addressed the committee via web cam and reviewed the major differences between the Senate and House healthcare proposals, principally the Senate's provision to allow states to opt out of a public provider option and differing levels of Medicaid coverage and federal reimbursement to expand Medicaid coverage. Beddoe did emphasize that both bills would provide significant resources to public health.

Steering committee members also heard from Andrea Held with the N.C. Immunization Branch of DHHS on the H1N1 flu outbreak and county response via immunization programs. Held said that as of the committee's meeting date, roughly half a million doses of H1N1 vaccine had been administered, and a million more doses had been ordered. The state expects to receive more than five million doses.

In other committee actions:

- District 17 Director Dana Jones of Cherokee County was appointed steering committee vice chair by Chair Viola Harris of Edgecombe County.

- Members set their next meeting dates for Feb. 11 and May 13. Each date falls on a Thursday, and each meeting will be held from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Albert Coates Local Government Center in Raleigh.

Commissioners receive kudos for efforts on JCPC funding

The efforts of county commissioners helped stave off cuts to the Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils, said Teresa Price, deputy secretary for Community Programs at the N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP). Price spoke to members of the NCACC Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee on Nov. 17.

Price noted the importance of JCPC funding and emphasized that it was one of the few initiatives not cut in the current state budget. She credited the pressure applied on legislators by county commissioners for helping the programs avoid any significant and potentially harmful budget cuts during last year's state budget negotiations.

"JCPC programs have proven over time that prevention works," she said. "Money spent on prevention is a very good investment because the sooner services intercede in a juvenile's case, the less likely the case will escalate to the adult level."

Price updated committee members on the state's growing gang problem, noting that 9.3 percent of youths encountered in North Carolina's juvenile justice system are involved in gangs. She also said that gangs are no longer an urban issue and are expanding to rural counties, and she pointed out that the state and fed-

eral governments, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, had appropriated millions of dollars to programs designed to address the gang issue.

Price also addressed the Youth Accountability Task Force, which was created by H1414 to look at the possibility of increasing the age at which an offender is regarded as an adult from 16 to 18. North Carolina and New York are the only states that classify 16-year-olds as adult offenders, and New York has a lot of exceptions that allow youths at 16 or 17 to be treated as juveniles.

Price said the major push for the change is based on recent research on brain development that shows the human brain, particularly among males, is not fully developed until age 24. However, it is recognized that raising the age to 18 will impact counties in many ways, including requiring increases in substance abuse, parenting and vocational programs.

Karen Calhoun, senior research and policy associate at the Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, spoke to the Commission's role within the state's criminal justice system.

She reviewed the history of the Commission, which was first created in the early 1990s to address the issues of prison overcrowding. Following exten-

sive research among all stakeholders and a spirited debate, the Commission developed recommendations to standardize sentencing so that offenders convicted of the same crime with the same basic criminal record would receive roughly the same sentence.

All offenders now must serve the entire portion of their minimum sentence. The amount of time they are required to serve of their maximum sentence after completing their minimum sentence depends on the offender's behavior while in prison. Calhoun stressed the research the Commission's staff conducts is grounded in numbers, and it frequently quantifies data for the N.C. Department of Justice, the State Bureau of Investigation and DJJDP. Annually, the staff completes prison population and juvenile crime projections. Every two years, they complete studies on adult recidivism, juvenile recidivism and the effectiveness of the JCPCs.

The principles that form the foundation of North Carolina's sentencing laws are that:

- sentence lengths should bear a close relationship to the time actually served.
- offenders convicted of similar offenses with similar criminal records should receive similar sentences.
- sentences should be proportionate

to the severity of the crime as measured by the harm to the victim(s) and the offender's prior record.

- the most expensive resource (prisons and jails) should be reserved for violent and repeat offenders, and community based programs should be used for nonviolent offenders with little or no prior record.

- sentencing policies should be supported by adequate prison and community resources.

Calhoun also covered the initiatives of Criminal Justice Partnership Programs (CJPP), which are the equivalent of JCPCs in the juvenile system. CJPPs provide programs for intermediate punishments, such as day reporting and electronic monitoring/house arrest. She said it is important that these programs are fully funded because they help reduce the need for more prisons.

In other committee action:

- Steering Committee Chair Hubert Sealy of Robeson County appointed Beaufort County's Jerry Langley as committee vice chair.

- Committee members set their next two meeting dates for Feb. 9 and May 11. Both dates fall on a Tuesday, and each meeting will be held from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Albert Coates Local Government Center in Raleigh.



County Manager David Peoples (left) called Lois Askew's work as Washington County's clerk to the board "world class."

Photo by Michael Kelly

Washington County sends Askew off in style

Lois Askew ended a 34-year run with Washington County at the end of November. The county held a retirement reception on Dec. 1 for Askew, who served 28 years as clerk to the board and assistant to the county manager.

"Lois' work performance has been exceptional and world class," said County Manager David Peoples in September, when Askew announced her retirement plans. "The county is losing a very valuable employee and asset."

Askew was succeeded by Julie Bennett, who previously served as executive assistant to the president and Board of Trustees at Martin Community College.

Carteret Commissioner Allen ends long run in local government

Pete Allen resigned his seat on the Carteret County Board of Commissioners on Nov. 16. Allen, who also retired as town manager of Atlantic Beach, cited health reasons for his resignation. He was in the third year of a four-year term as a commissioner.

Allen has been involved in local government for the past 25 years beginning with his election as mayor of Emerald Isle in 1983. His résumé includes a one-year stint as county manager in 2001-02.

Judge rules against Graham County in dispute with Board of Elections

A superior court judge ordered the Graham County Board of Commissioners on Nov. 30 to pay for a part-time employee hired by the county Board of Elections even though the commissioners had not officially approved the position.

Judge James Baker ordered the commissioners to pay the worker, who had been working for the Board of Elections for several weeks. As of press time, Graham County had not decided whether it would appeal the judge's decision.

According to reports in *The Graham*

Star, the issue began in September, when the county transferred the Board of Election's only full-time employee to the tax office after the abrupt departure of the county's chief tax assessor. This caused an immediate need for an experienced administrative assistant in that office to continue work with the county's upcoming revaluation. The Board of Elections' director then hired two part-time workers to help prepare for the 2010 elections, but the county only approved one additional person to work in the office.

Chatham commissioners receive kudos

The Chatham County Board of Commissioners received the 2009 County Commissioners Award from the N.C. School Boards Association on Nov. 17 in recognition of the commissioners' outstanding support of public education. The NCSBA honors one Board of Commissioners each year and made the selection based on a nomination letter submitted by the Chatham County Board of Education. Despite a shortage of revenues, commissioners provided flexibility with capital funding so that the school system could match a Golden LEAF Foundation grant for school technology. From left to right, Commissioners George Lucier, Carl Thompson, Sally Kost and Tom Vanderbeck accept the award.



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Polk seniors enjoy new recreation center

Polk County held a grand opening for its new Senior Recreation Center on Nov. 18. The county purchased the building, which was being used as a private school, along with another building that will become an adult daycare center, for \$1.2 million. The county added a commercial kitchen and pick-up point for home-delivered meals, along with some other modifications, for roughly \$500,000. The grand opening drew roughly 500 attendees, according to County Manager Ryan Whitson.

Moorefield returns to Cumberland

Rickey Moorefield will leave his post as Sampson County manager and attorney to become Cumberland County attorney on Jan. 1. Moorefield, who worked as Cumberland’s assistant county attorney from October 2006 to April 2007, succeeds Grainger Barrett, who died in July. Moorefield also previously served as county attorney in Macon and Alamance. He is a former Alamance County commissioner.

“We think we are getting a real gem in you since you have served where we sit,” Cumberland County Commissioner Jeannette Council told Moorefield.

Jail part of new Transylvania public safety facility

Transylvania County commissioners officially opened the doors to the county’s new Public Safety Facility on Nov. 7 during a dedication service. The 60,000-square-foot, \$20.3 million facility can hold up to 114 inmates and can be expanded to accommodate 300. The facility houses all the county’s emergency services, including e-911 communications.

“This is truly an awesome facility that all our taxpayers can be proud of and that will keep us all safe and secure,” said Commissioner Jason Chappell, according to *The Transylvania Times*.

Perquimans commissioner appointed to State Youth Advisory Council

Perquimans County Commissioner Tammy Miller-White, a program facilitator for Perquimans County High School, has been appointed to a two-year term on the N.C. State Youth Advisory Council (YAC) by Governor Beverly Perdue.

YAC provides support and advice to the State Youth Council and local youth councils. YAC is composed of adults and high school students and administers the distribution of mini-grants to youth programs.

SHORTS

Catawba: Network Administrator Rick Cook has been awarded the 2009 James S. Cooper Award from the N.C. Local Government Information System Association, a statewide organization focused on connectivity among local governments. ... **Cumberland:** Deputy County Manager Juanita P. Pilgrim has been appointed by Governor Beverly Perdue to the N.C. Employment Security Commission. ... Commissioners authorized \$3.85 million in funding Nov. 16 for wiring and plumbing upgrades at the Crown Center. ... **Davidson:** Troy Coggins, a 15-year veteran of the Cooperative Extension Office, succeeded the recently retired Robert Lopp as CES director Nov. 10. ... County employees were given the option of taking a personal day without pay between Dec. 21 and Jan. 1. ... **Forsyth:** Ronda Tatum, a 16-year county employee, has succeeded Joe Bartel as director of budget and management. Bartel retired Sept.

30 after a career with the county that lasted more than 30 years. ... **Henderson:** Assistant County Engineer Natalie Berry has been appointed to serve as the area representative for the Certified Professional Storm Water Quality (CPSWQ) Association. CPSWQ is a professional development association for individuals working with storm water quality management. ... **Orange:** Clarence Grier succeeded Gary Humphreys as finance director on Dec. 14. Humphreys will retire at the end of the year. ... **Polk:** The county closed on its \$1.6 million purchase of Lake Adger on Nov. 20. The county will be able to draw up to 8 million gallons of water daily from the 420-acre water reservoir in order to meet the county’s water consumption needs. ... **Rowan:** Kevin Auten assumed the position of acting sheriff Dec. 1 following the retirement of George Wilhelm. Auten has served in law enforcement for the past 21 years.



LOCAL ELECTED LEADERS

Academy

Strategic Leadership Education for County and Municipal Elected Officials

Local Finance: Making Sense of Annual Financial Statements

JANUARY 13, 2010	WILMINGTON, HILTON RIVERSIDE
JANUARY 29, 2010	CONCORD, EMBASSY SUITES
FEBRUARY 17, 2010	GREENVILLE, HILTON
FEBRUARY 24, 2010	ASHEVILLE, DOUBLETREE BILTMORE
MARCH 3, 2010	KITTY HAWK, HILTON GARDEN INN

As stewards of the public trust, local elected officials must put in place the funding and infrastructure their community needs to thrive. This engaging, one-day workshop is designed to help county commissioners and city council members understand how to read annual financial statements. Elected officials will learn the right questions to ask and how the decisions they make will affect their community’s future. Participants are encouraged to invite their managers, administrators, and finance directors to attend as well. The workshop will conclude with a 2-hour segment on ethics that meets the new statutory requirement for city and county elected officials.

This Regional LeaderShop is a program of the Local Elected Leaders Academy and is offered regionally to encourage participation and to minimize travel time. Elected officials are eligible for recognition through the NC Association of County Commissioners and the NC League of Municipalities. Scholarships are available through the Local Elected Leaders Academy. To register online or to request scholarship information, visit www.sog.unc.edu/courses/1641/, or contact Gail Wilkins at wilkins@sog.unc.edu or 919.962.9754.

Visit www.lela.unc.edu for an up-to-date calendar of educational programs offered through the Local Elected Leaders Academy. To learn more, contact Donna Warner at 919.962.1575 or warner@sog.unc.edu.

NCACC issues call for entries in Outstanding County Program Awards contest

With 100 counties and 100 talented staffs in North Carolina, there are bound to be a lot of good ideas for ways to improve and expand services to citizens.

Approved by the NCACC Board of Directors in 1991, the Outstanding County Program Awards (OCPA) competition is designed to recognize the outstanding work being done by counties across the state, and also to share these ideas and innovations with other counties.

Now in its 19th year, the awards program honors counties and groups of counties (not individuals) for their support of excellence. Entries involving multi-jurisdictional collaboration are strongly encouraged to apply. Programs entered into the LGFCU Employee Productivity Award Program also may be submitted for the OCPA program, but the focus is more directly on innovation and multi-county collaboration and, while

productivity is encouraged, it is not the major factor in determining winners.

Projects/programs must have been implemented between Jan. 1, 2008, and Dec. 31, 2009. Applications must be postmarked, faxed or e-mailed to the Association by Friday, Feb. 26, 2010. Winning programs will be featured in an issue of *CountyLines*, and the winners will be honored during a meeting of their Board of Commissioners during National

County Government Month, which will be held in April 2010.

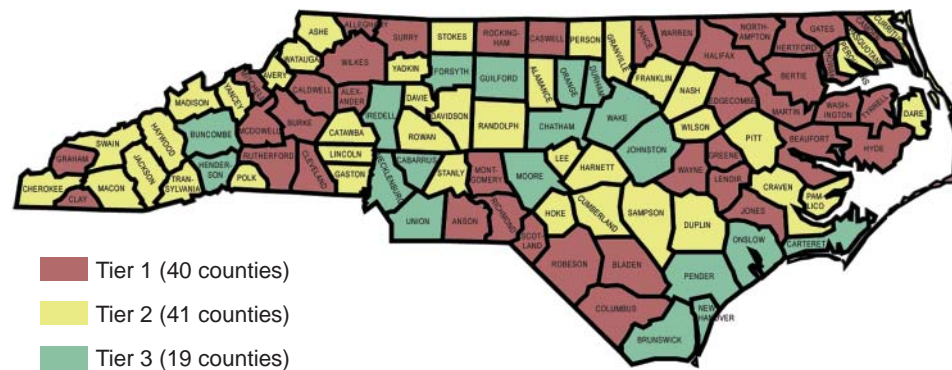
For major criteria and detailed information, and to obtain an entry form, visit www.ncacc.org/awards/ocpa/about.html.

Judging teams made up of elected and appointed county officials review entries and select at least three winning programs in each of three categories: General Government, Human Services and Public Education/Participation.

9 counties change tiers in 2010 economic development rankings

Alexander and McDowell counties have been designated as two of the state's 40 most economically distressed counties for 2010. The new county tier designations, released by the N.C. Department of Commerce on Nov. 30, determine a variety of state funding opportunities to assist in economic development.

Under the law governing what are commonly known as Article 3J tax credits, the state's 40 most distressed counties are designated Tier 1 counties. The middle 41 counties are designated as Tier 2, while the 19 most prosperous counties are placed in Tier 3. The rankings are based on an assessment of each county's unemployment rate, median household



income, population growth, and assessed property value per capita.

In addition to Alexander and McDowell, Craven, Haywood and Lincoln counties (Tier 2) were moved down one

tier for 2010. The counties of Onslow (Tier 3), Pender (Tier 3), Cumberland (Tier 2) and Wilson (Tier 2) all moved into a higher tier.

Potential benefits include:

- Tier 1 designees can offer a \$12,500 tax credit per new job with a requirement to create at least five jobs, and a 7 percent tax credit for eligible business property expenditures.
 - Tier 2 designees can offer a \$5,000 tax credit per new job with a requirement to create at least 10 jobs, and a 5 percent tax credit for eligible business property expenditures of more than \$1 million.
 - Tier 3 designees can offer a \$750 tax credit per new job with a requirement to create at least 15 jobs, and a 3.5 percent tax credit for eligible business property expenditures of more than \$2 million.
- Article 3J tax credits replaced the Article 3A "Bill Lee" tax credits in 2007.



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