

Greg Edds, Chairman
Jim Greene, Vice- Chairman
Mike Caskey
Judy Klusman
Craig Pierce

Aaron Church, County Manager
Carolyn Barger, Clerk to the Board
John W. Dees, II, County Attorney

Rowan County Board of Commissioners

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MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ROWAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS August 11, 2020 – 1:00 PM

**PLEASE NOTE: DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
THE MEETING WAS HELD BY REMOTE PARTICIPATION FOR THE BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS, STAFF AND THE PUBLIC**

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Commissioners Participating:

Greg Edds, Chairman
Jim Greene, Vice-Chairman
Mike Caskey, Member
Judy Klusman, Member
Craig Pierce, Member

County Manager Aaron Church, Clerk to the Board Carolyn Barger, County Attorney Jay Dees, Assistant County Manager/CIO Randy Cress and Assistant County Manager/Finance Director Leslie Heidrick were also participating.

Chairman Edds convened the meeting at 1:00 p.m.

Chaplain Michael Taylor provided the Invocation.

Chairman Edds led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Pierce moved, Commissioner Greene seconded and the vote to approve the agenda passed unanimously.

1. DISCUSSION REGARDING RESTRUCTURING OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INCLUDING NEW POSITIONS, RECLASSIFICATIONS AND HIRING INCENTIVES

Chairman Edds provided the background regarding the purpose of the meeting. Chairman Edds explained the job functions within the Environmental Health (EH) Department with regards to the duties of Program Specialists and Health Specialists. Chairman Edds stated the County had gone through a series of changes such as employees leaving to work in other counties, employees who were terminated and employees who had retired. The results of the changes had left the County without a number of employees, which put the County far behind with EH inspections. Chairman

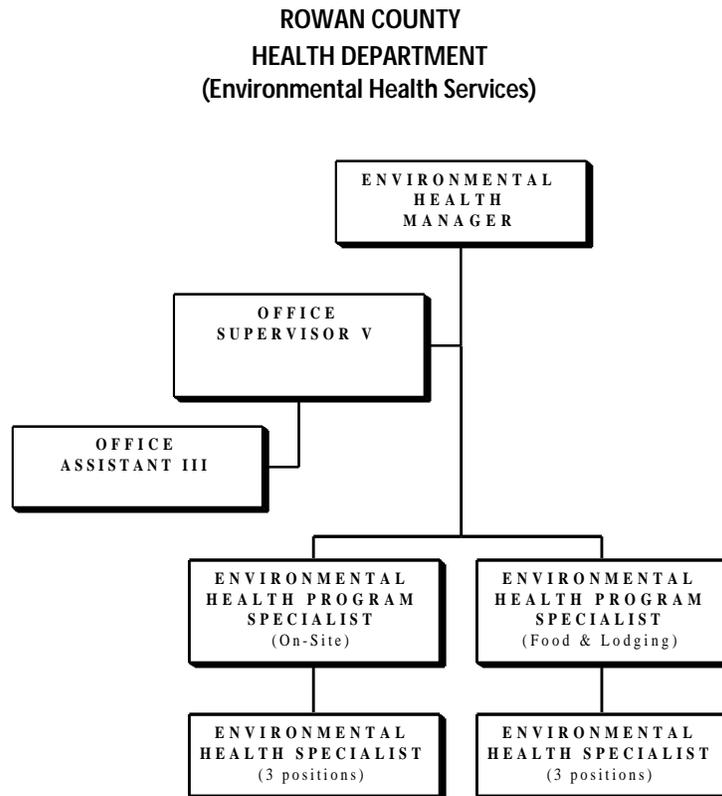
Edds said the Board of Commissioners, as leaders, were going to set EH up to succeed. Chairman Edds then turned the meeting over to Assistant County Manager / Chief Information Officer, Randy Cress, who presented a proposed restructuring plan for EH, as well as information regarding new positions, reclassifications and hiring incentives.

Mr. Cress said the County had a backlog and was operating with a skeleton crew at best in trying to address the current backlog. Mr. Cress said he had been impressed in working with Adrian Pruett, the County's new EH Supervisor. The desire was to acquire talent for EH Specialists with a plan that would attract and retain those employees.

The proposed hiring incentive included a signing bonus of \$25,000 overall. With the Board's approval, the signing bonus would offer \$15,000 to start and an additional \$10,000 upon the employee's one-year anniversary.

Next, Mr. Cress discussed reclassification of positions. The recommendations would place the County's pay scale higher than surrounding counties to hopefully ensure employees would not leave for a few dollars more.

Mr. Cress highlighted the vacant positions and the proposed organizational chart, which included the addition of one Office Assistant III as follows:



The end goal was to make sure EH was set up to succeed and Mr. Cress assured the Board he felt the recommended changes would allow the County to sign on new employees and retain them, as well.

In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Greene, Mr. Cress reviewed the total number of vacancies to be filled (total of five).

There was further discussion regarding the pay grade/salary/benefit information that would move Rowan County above the surrounding counties.

Commissioner Caskey questioned the minimum qualifications for the EH specialist positions. Health Director Nina Oliver explained that each program had required authorizations that had to be achieved for an employee to be able to work independently. According to Ms. Oliver, the employees could not perform the EH work for the County until they were authorized. The employees who started as interns learned from the County's specialists, as well as through a course offered by the State. Ms. Oliver detailed the steps required in the intern training process that lead to the interns becoming authorized. Ms. Oliver expressed hope the County could fill the vacant positions with someone already authorized so they could "hit the ground running". Ms. Oliver added that those who were already authorized would be looking for higher salaries and she felt the \$25,000 signing bonus and increases in the pay grades would help to remedy the current situation.

Mr. Cress confirmed to Commissioner Caskey the signing bonus applied only to new hires who were authorized and not interns. Mr. Cress also confirmed to Chairman Edds the signing bonus would apply only to fulltime employees.

Commissioner Klusman questioned the status of Tucker Osborne. Mr. Pruett reported that Mr. Osborne was hired in December 2019 and was in the process of working through mock septic inspections, etc. Mr. Pruett was hopeful Mr. Osborne would be licensed by mid to late fall. Mr. Pruett said the State exam must also be taken and passed within three (3) years of the hiring date.

Commissioner Klusman asked about hiring interns to have backups in place. Mr. Pruett said if another position were open it would be great to have an intern in order to have the next generation in training.

Chairman Edds questioned the current turnaround time for onsite well and septic inspections and Mr. Pruett responded the timeframe was eight (8) to ten (10) weeks. Chairman Edds said the timeframe was a problem. Chairman Edds described the development process as the gateway to the community. Chairman Edds continued by saying the County needed to spend money to shore up EH and the justification was the monies would be returned in the form of jobs and tax revenues. Chairman Edds said the County had fought the delays with inspections for the past few years and he wanted the County to have the best framework of anywhere.

Commissioner Greene agreed with Chairman Edds and said the County had a real issue. Commissioner Greene said the Department needed to plan for retirements and keeping employees in place. Commissioner Greene felt it unacceptable to be so far behind and requested the Board ask the County Manager to look into options regarding long-term planning for the Department.

Commissioner Pierce asked if approval of the recommendations would necessitate a rate increase. Mr. Pruett said the County was charging substantially less than other counties and was not covering its' costs. Mr. Pruett provided examples of what other counties were charging for various EH services.

Commissioner Pierce felt now was the right time to revamp all facets of EH.

Chairman Edds asked Mr. Pruett to pull some data together for the Board and to present a new fee schedule at an upcoming meeting. Chairman Edds explained that EH was unique in that the Department fell under the jurisdiction of the Health Department and was governed by the Board of Health. Chairman Edds said while the Commissioners did not control the Health Department, it did control the purse strings. Chairman Edds said the Commissioners were working with Ms. Oliver and the Board of Health to remedy the situation in EH.

Ms. Oliver said the fee schedules for the Health Department, including EH, were reviewed/revamped each year. Ms. Oliver said she had asked the Health Department managers to look at the fee schedules and submit them to her next month. Ms. Oliver said she had also asked Mr. Pruett to create a comparison of fees with the surrounding counties. Ms. Oliver said all fee schedules went before the Board of Health for review as to what had changed, and was increased/decreased before being submitted to the Board of Commissioners. Ms. Oliver said if the Commissioners wanted the information sooner, the Health Department could do so.

Commissioner Greene agreed with Commissioner Pierce and said the fees should be increased. Commissioner Greene expressed his displeasure with the ongoing problems in EH.

Ms. Oliver stated that conversations concerning EH started last year and had been followed by a series of events with employees leaving and also retiring. Ms. Oliver said the State had been asked for assistance but had denied the request. Ms. Oliver said the County had also sought assistance from other counties but they were unable to help because it would then create a backlog for their own counties. Along with other circumstances, the County had reached the backlog it was now facing. Ms. Oliver expressed appreciation for the County providing the additional support and funding to bring in authorized employees who could perform the required duties in EH.

Chairman Edds pointed out that counties who had been able to provide weekend and after-hours staffing assistance had to stop when the Coronavirus Pandemic started due to bans prohibiting their employees to travel across county lines.

Chairman Edds asked if the County could receive a revised fee schedule for its first meeting in September and Ms. Oliver said yes.

Commissioner Klusman moved to approve the recommendations as provided in an email from Randy Cress (the email is hereto attached and made part of the minutes). The motion was followed by a second from Commissioner Pierce.

Commissioner Caskey asked about the County Manager providing recommendations for different options to handle these situations in the future. Mr. Church responded there were different options but asked if Commissioner Caskey was referring to consolidation of the Health Department. Commissioner Caskey said yes and he added that since the issues in EH had been going on for awhile he would rather receive the options sooner rather than later.

Commissioner Klusman agreed with Commissioner Caskey and felt the Board should get the problem solved.

Chairman Edds recognized Commissioner Klusman for being a member of the Board of Health and thanked her for the work she provided.

Upon being put to a vote, the motion on the floor passed unanimously.

2. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, Commissioner Pierce moved to adjourn at 1:54 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Caskey and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,



Carolyn Barger, MMC, NCMCC
Clerk to the Board