

**PERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**July 7, 2008**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Johnny Myrl Lunsford, Chairman  
Jimmy B. Clayton, Vice-Chairman  
Kyle W. Puryear  
Larry H. Bowes  
Larry E. Yarborough, Jr. - ABSENT

Paul L. Bailey, Interim County Manager  
C. Ronald Aycock, County Attorney  
Faye T. Fuller, Clerk to the Board  
Deputy Clerk to the Board

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The Board of Commissioners for the County of Person, North Carolina, met in recessed session on Monday, July 7, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the Commissioners' meeting room in the Person County Office Building.

Chairman Lunsford called the meeting to order. Commissioner Clayton led in prayer. Commissioner Bowes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Heidi York, who will begin employment with Person County effective July 21, 2008 as County Manager, was also in attendance.

Chairman Lunsford read the following statement:

*We are disappointed that the school board refused to meet with the Board of Commissioners today, July 7<sup>th</sup>, to attempt to settle their objection to the county's 2008-09 appropriation to the schools. We had hoped to settle this issue at a minimum expense to the public. If this controversy continues through the judicial system, it is estimated to cost taxpayers at least \$100,000 in attorney fees, staff time and other associated costs. These funds should be put to better use, benefitting the citizens of Person County through much needed expenditures for public safety, public education, ambulance services and other critical services, not used to settle the Board of Education's disagreements.*

*The Person County Board of Commissioners takes its obligation to provide public services to the citizens of the County in a fiscally responsible manner very seriously. We must balance the provision of public services with the ability of our citizens to pay property taxes in these trying economic times. We believe our public schools deserve our highest priority and that providing other essential services such as public safety and ambulance services is also critical. We have shown our commitment to public schools this year by increasing our appropriation in the operating budget by 10% over last year's funding level. In fact, increases in funding have been awarded to the Schools at a steady pace:*

<u>FY</u>	<u>Current Expense</u>	<u>% Increase</u>
2004-05	\$6,535,836	
2005-06	7,075,000	8.25%
2006-07	7,875,000	11.31%
2007-08	8,479,850	7.68%
2008-09	9,327,835	10.00%

*Total increases of 37.25% over the last four fiscal years. So it is clear that our public schools are and have been a priority for this Board. Any statement to the contrary is false.*

*In addition to restricting funding to our other agencies, we have cut cost-of-living increase for County employees to 1.5%; the smallest increase given in at least the last four years, despite our downward spiraling economy. All the while, increases for school employee salaries are expected to be 3% this year.*

*We are also spending down our fund balance this year (the County's savings account), a non-recurring revenue. We all know from our personal family finances that you cannot pay for a continuing expense year after year from a savings account. We must retain a steady amount of fund balance to provide for cash flow and emergencies. In addition, a healthy level of fund balance is necessary for us to be able to borrow money at reasonable rates when financing large ticket items like capital projects for the public schools.*

*The Board of County commissioners believes we should end this controversy as soon as possible and devote our time and resources to providing efficient public services that our citizens deserve. Without the cooperation of the Board of Education however, our valuable tax dollars are being diverted to settling disagreements, rather than improving the lives of our residents.*

County Attorney Ron Aycock restated that the Board had authorized the engagement of an additional attorney, Mr. Jon Maxwell, retired Guilford County Attorney, to assist with this matter. Mr. Maxwell is considered an expert in this area and is presently representing Beaufort County in Appellate Court.

Mr. Maxwell spoke to the Board and apprised them of the state statutes governing mediation sessions. He further assured the Board that the County's position is legally sound should the matter proceed to court.

Commissioner Puryear questioned, should the County be found responsible to additionally fund the school system, where the additional money would be derived. Mr. Maxwell said that Statute allows that the tax rate to be raised.

Commissioner Clayton, after quoting statistics from the State Board of Education website, said that Person County has met its obligation in funding the school system.

Chairman Lunsford stated he was ready to put the matter to rest. A decision needs to be made in order that the tax notices may be mailed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Clayton to instruct the County Attorney to contact the Board of Education for a date to meet jointly during the week of July 22-25 and that a date be agreed upon by July 17<sup>th</sup>. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bowes.

Commissioner Puryear asked the County Attorney if he had been in contact with the Board of Education attorney about possible meeting dates. Mr. Aycock responded that he had and the dates suggested by Mr. Clayton as well as others had been offered and were agreeable with a mediator with whom both attorney's had been in contact with.

Commissioner Puryear offered a **Substitute Motion** that the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners be in contact with the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners to avoid any confusion in communication. The motion **died for lack of a second**.

The original **motion carried unanimously**.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

A **motion** was made by Commissioner Bowes, **seconded** by Commissioner Clayton and **carried** to adjourn the meeting at 7:31 p.m.

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**Faye T. Fuller, CMC**  
**Clerk to the Board**

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**Johnny Myrl Lunsford**  
**Chairman**