

**THE ANSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS** convened for their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, March 10, 2020 beginning at 6:00 P.M. in the Board Room, Suite 209, of the Anson County Government Center.

Commissioners present:

- Mr. Ross Streater, Chair
- Mr. Jarvis Woodburn, Vice-Chair
- Ms. Vancine Sturdivant
- Mr. Lawrence Gatewood
- Mr. Bobby Sikes
- Dr. James Sims
- Mr. Harold Smith

Staff members present:

- Mr. Barron Monroe II, County Mgr.
- Ms. Denise Cannon, Clerk to Board
- Mr. Cary Garner, Finance Officer
- Ms. Amber Daniels, Asst. Finance
- Dr. Thompson, Health Department
- Ms. Evonne Burr, Health Department
- Rev. Steve Adams, Elections Director
- Mr. Larry Newton, Tax Assessor
- Mr. Chris Joffson, IT Manager

Also Present: Scott Forbes, ESQ County Attorney

Chairman Streater called the meeting to **Order**, welcoming all who were present. Chairman Streater asked Reverend Rob Washington to deliver the **Invocation**.

**Approval of the Agenda by Commissioners:**

Commissioner Sturdivant moved to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner Sims, motion carried unanimously.

**Consent Agenda:**

Commissioner Gatewood moved to approve the Consent Agenda as follows: Board minutes, property tax refunds/releases/adjustments, water bill write-offs, NC A&T University Strategic Planning Council, and the Sandhills quarterly report. Seconded, by Commissioner Smith, motion carried unanimously.

## **Appearances:**

**Ms. Caroline Goins, Anson County Partnership for Children Director and Dr. Sharon Little, Program Coordinator Early Childhood, SPCC,** appeared before the Board with a resolution proclaiming April as the month of the young child in Anson County. Ms. Goins explained that at the State of Education meeting last week, it was mentioned that 71% of youth 17-24 are not eligible to serve in the military because of physical requirements, educational competences, or criminal records. This shocking statistic clearly demonstrates we are not preparing our children for the future. Yet, 50 years of research says to better prepare children we need to focus on early childhood development. Ms. Goins further explained that 95% of brain development happens in the first 2,000 days of a child's life and it sets the foundation for success in school and success in life. There are approximately 1,300 children ranging from birth to age 5 living in Anson County. Approximately, 60% of those children live in poverty. Our community cannot thrive without stronger support of our children and families and it starts with a greater understanding of how children develop. Our business owners, high school teachers, ministers, grandparents, and community leaders need basic understandings of child development. Ms. Goins shared that historically, the Partnership has participated in two national advocacy campaigns: April's Week of the Young Children celebration and the Child Abuse Prevention pinwheel garden. However, these are not enough. Ms. Goins said. "Thanks to community partners such as Anson County Schools, South Piedmont Community College, Atrium Health-Anson, the Anson County Chamber of commerce, the Anson County Arts Council, and a host of governmental agencies" for their contributions. Ms. Goins also shared the Partnership has arranged a month both open to the public and private events to advocate for, and celebrate with, our children, families and childcare providers. Ms. Goins asked the Board to post a stand for our children and families. To be a driving force as community leaders and advocate for young children by sponsoring an official proclamation to recognize April as the "Month of the Young Child", not just because our children deserve it, but because ultimately the strength of society is dictated by the well-being of our children. Dr. Little said that Anson County has 900 children ages 0-5, that do not have quality access to childcare and

supporting the “April-Month of The Child” is very important and if possible come out and visit a childcare center.

Commissioner Sims made a motion to approve a resolution proclaiming April as The Month of The Young Child in Anson County. Seconded, by Commissioner Smith, motion carried unanimously.

### **Public Addresses:**

**Mr. Rufus Caple** appeared before the Board to share his concerns about the closing of the Wadesboro Walmart. Mr. Caple said it was very upsetting and took note of the Walmart employee’s concerns. Mr. Caple said when Walmart first came to Anson County it was possibly challenging to other established business, but Walmart has been an asset to many consumers in Anson County. Now, its closing will impact the elderly, poor, and employees (losing 200+ jobs). Mr. Caple said he hopes Anson County will take the initiative to look at all aspects of business wanting to come to the County and not push businesses away. Mr. Caple shared that it would be helpful if the Commissioners would organize a meeting with Walmart or send a letter.

County Manager Monroe explained that a joint letter between the Town of Wadesboro and the County was being drafted and will be sent to Walmart. County Manager Monroe explained that Walmart is a private enterprise that makes their own internal business decisions, noting that incentives are used for recruiting businesses or expanding already existing businesses within the county, not necessarily to keep an already established business in place.

County Attorney Forbes read a letter from the Walmart Corporation, dated March 4, 2020, regarding the closing.

Mr. Caple and Board members continued to dialogue about the strong impact the Walmart closing will have on the citizens of Anson County.

**Dr. Fred Thompson, Anson County Health Department Director**, appeared before the Board to inform citizens about the ongoing updates with the Covid - 19, or Coronavirus. Dr. Thompson said that Governor Roy Cooper has issued a State of Emergency for the state of North Carolina, relative to the Coronavirus outbreak. Dr. Thompson said that Anson County is fortunate to have a very seasoned Health Department team with years of experience. The local public

health team is in constant contact with the Communicable Disease Branch and Emergency Preparedness staff in Raleigh. Restrictions have been placed on long-term care facilities which limit visitors and the public. Dr. Thompson said his team is in frequent contact with the hospital, surrounding doctor's offices, and other providers in the county, about coordinating and response planning for the Coronavirus. Dr. Thompson said his staff is continually updating social media and websites with the most current information available, in conjunction with the division of public health coronavirus hotline (24/7) 866-462-3821. Dr. Thompson said he supports the decision to not close public schools at this time and there is no need for healthy people to wear facemasks. Dr. Thompson stated this situation is changing daily if not hourly. Ms. Burr, Health Department Administrative Officer informed the Board that anyone can call the local Health Department with questions.

**Ms. Charlette Rhue Bennett** appeared before the Board to discuss her concerns about the Walmart closing. Ms. Bennett gave a brief history of the small stores that were here many years ago, noting that the community reluctantly accepted Walmart. Ms. Bennett read a Facebook post from her page that expressed her concerns and distresses after learning about the Walmart closing:

“The announcement that Walmart in Wadesboro is abruptly closing is shocking! It is cruel! I feel strongly that this decision needs to be reevaluated, not just because Walmart is a major employer in Anson County and not just because many local people and passersby shop here. This decision needs to be reevaluated because Walmart wanted to come here and we welcomed them! You opened in one location and we were there! You built a huge store at another location on Hwy 74 and we were there, too! How can you turn your back on the employees that showed up to work daily to make sure their products were displayed neatly, your customers were treated well, and your store was clean? How can you snatch jobs away from so many people who took pride in their work? How can you not try every, single remedy to fix any problems there may have been? I know, I know. It's business. It happens all the time. I get that. But, sometimes, sometimes, communities are given hope, pride, and independence because of opportunities...opportunities that decent jobs provide. They're making billions and billions of dollars every year. Why

must you make even more by closing one store in an already underserved area where many employees and customers depend on it?

Ms. Bennett explained that she interacted with a store manager and dialogued about the store closing and employees losing their jobs. Ms. Bennett said the manager told her that low performing stores are closed; it is about profit and losses.”

Ms. Bennett shared signatures from citizens from all parts of life in Anson County opposing Walmart’s closing.

Board members responded to Ms. Bennett, stating they were not aware of the Walmart closing before the announcement and were told the store was underperforming. Attorney Forbes explained that the store had competition with online sales and was just not profitable, noting Walmart Corporation is closing seventeen other Walmart stores. Attorney Forbes stated the Board does not have any influence over whether Walmart closes or not, nor were they consulted about Bentonville Headquarters’ decision before being informed with the rest of the public.

Commissioner Sturdivant said she contacted Walmart managers the next day for an explanation for the closing. She shared that Walmart has been a contributor to her charities and very generous to her organizations and truly regrets that Walmart is closing.

Ms. Bennett shared her Facebook name so the Board can access her video about Walmart.

**Appointments:**

Commissioner Sturdivant made a motion to appoint Diane Timmons and Ashlie Jones Tolliver as Anson County Review Officers. Seconded, by Commissioner Gatewood, motion carried unanimously.

## **Manager's Report:**

Finance Officer Cary Garner updated Board members about the County's FY 18-19 audit. Mr. Garner explained that as of February 20, 2020, the FY 19-20 contract, under guidance from the Local Government Commission, was amended with a deliverable date April 30, 2020. Mr. Garner said information will be distributed in print for the 2018-2019 Year for the Board and will be uploaded to the LGC website.

Finance Officer Garner introduced Ms. Amber Daniels, Anson County's new Assistant Finance Officer. Ms. Daniels said she is excited to be part of the team.

Commissioner Smith questioned Mr. Newton about the number of Blacks working in his department. Mr. Newton stated that no employees currently working in the Tax Assessor's Office are Black, but noted that the County just hired for a position that followed proper County interviewing procedures where candidates were objectively interviewed by an interviewing committee (this specific committee contained multi-racial members with equal votes). The committee selected a lady who happened to be White or Caucasian while the second ranked candidate happened to be Black. Had the first ranking choice declined the position, it would have been offered to the second ranking choice, regardless of race.

County Manager Monroe refreshed everyone on the 2020 Census and why it is so important to Anson County. Mr. Monroe reminded everyone that the 2020 census determines how much money that is received from the federal government, so every Ansonian needs to be counted, noting there are undercounted populations such as the elderly, children, and people without an address.

County Manager Monroe noted that SPCC will be assisting Walmart workers in addition to providing their mobile bus to aid in citizen access to computers over the next several weeks.

County Manager Monroe gave an update on the DSS project, noting that the request for proposals was closed in early February with staff analyzing and evaluating the received proposals. County Manager Monroe said a more in depth

discussion is planned for the Board recessed meeting scheduled for March 11, 2020.

### **Chairman's Report:**

Nothing to Report

### **Commissioner Concerns, Petitions, Announcements, and Comments:**

Commissioner Smith acknowledged Commissioner Gatewood on his appointment to the NC A&T University Strategic Planning Council.

Commissioner Gatewood addressed the Board and audience members to share his concerns about the Walmart closing. Commissioner Gatewood said that he was saddened and shocked by their sudden departure from Anson County.

Commissioner Gatewood then shared a video of the effects of a Walmart closing in Winnsboro, Fairfield County, SC.

Commissioner Gatewood said Walmart is in business to make a profit and cannot grow their income sales based on declining population, in addition to increased dollar stores in surrounding municipalities. In addition, Anson County residents frequent other neighboring Walmart stores, not just the Wadesboro Walmart. Commissioner Gatewood said he has recently visited Winnsboro, SC, and the citizens attitudes were "we survived before Walmart, we survived during Walmart, and we will survive after Walmart is gone." Commissioner Gatewood said this is an attitude that we should take in Anson County.

Vice-Chair Woodburn informed the Board that the NCACC district 10 meeting would be on March 17, 2020 at the Stanly Commons, Albemarle at 6:00 pm.

Commissioner Sturdivant shared that she visited with the Future Farmers of America program at the High School and was thoroughly impressed. Commissioner Sturdivant recognized the outstanding work of their hydroponics project and green house facility.

Commissioner Gatewood announced that Rose's store has open, with a grand opening planned for Wednesday, April 1, 2020.

Commissioner Gatewood informed the Board and audience members that there are 69 out of 100 counties that have added similar 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment sanctuary resolutions.

Vice-Chair Woodburn made a motion to recess until Wednesday, March 11, 2020 at 2 pm, seconded by Commissioner Gatewood. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted:

Denise Cannon  
Clerk to the Board