

**MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET WORK SESSION
June 6, 2023**

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met Tuesday, June 6, 2023 at 3:32 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Stoney Greene, Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson, Commissioner Bill Sexton, and Commissioner Greg Minton.

Also present for the meeting were John Yates, County Manager; Tony Triplett, County Attorney; Chris Huffman, Finance Director; Brooke Felts, Assistant County Attorney; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Keith Elmore welcomed everyone and called the work session to order.

FEE INCREASES – Chairman Elmore asked the Board’s opinion on the fee increases requested, he is good leaving them alone and asked what the others would like to do.

CONSENSUS – After discussion, the majority of the Commissioners agreed to leave the fee increases as presented in the proposed 2023-2024 Wilkes County Budget.

ADDITIONS/CHANGES TO THE PROPOSED 2023-2024 RECOMMENDED BUDGET –

- a) Additional 2% pay increase (total of 7%) for all full-time employees
- b) Appalachian Regional Library Wilkes County increase of \$22,157 (total \$731,515)
- c) Lincoln Heights Recreation Corp increase of \$750 (total \$2,500) and move to Cultural Arts, History, and Museum category
- d) Wilkes County Soil & Water reduce Mobile Soils Classroom from \$121,053 to \$8,053 (received grant for \$113,000) and increase Salary line to add one new position Grade 67 Natural Resource Conservationist/Stream Flow Rehab Specialist (\$67,899) total decrease to Soil & Water’s Budget \$45,101

CONSENSUS – After a brief discussion, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to all of the above changes to the proposed 2023-2024 Wilkes County Budget.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION – Chairman Elmore stated there is a question regarding the Sheriff’s Department request, Sheriff Shew and his staff came up with a pay plan to address compression. He stated the Board started out with a 5% COLA for County employees and increased it to 7%, this helps everybody, but it does not help with compression. The question is what do they do, if anything, for the Sheriff’s Department. They have been discussing this and he opened it up to the Board at this time. Commissioner Sexton said they have one of the best

Sheriff's Departments in the State and he has voiced his opinion. He would like to give them what they ask for and he still stands by that. Commissioner Minton added he is in favor as well. Chairman Elmore asked if they have looked at the plan and both indicated they had.

Chairman Elmore asked the remaining Board members their thoughts on the plan. Vice Chairman Greene replied the Sheriff's Department does an excellent job, keeps them safe, and they have a dangerous job, which he understands. When they go into this line of work, they deal with criminals, get shot at, etc. but that is the life they chose. Just like timber cutters know a tree might fall on them and truck drivers might wreck, but this is part of the job description. He added when they look at the plan, it is a lot of increase all at once and he wishes he could do this in his business in the private sector, but he can't. Vice Chairman Greene stated he can support one step of the plan in addition to the 7%. Commissioner Johnson stated they did a good job laying out the plan and answering questions. If one step would help to get them closer to their goal, he can support this. They would like to do something to address the need. Chairman Elmore added he can support one step, it will not fix the issue, but the rest of the county departments may feel left out. He added historically they have done this from time to time; they fixed areas where they have had pay issues. They addressed EMS and are building them a new building; they have addressed it at Social Services; and the County Employees are getting a \$20 million facility. They can't always be fair across the board and have to do things they feel are right. He thought they were all good at 7%. Chairman Elmore added to try to reach a consensus he will support one step plus the 7% already approved and he appreciates the Board working together to make this decision.

CONSENSUS – After discussion, the majority of the Commissioners agreed to add one step (step 4) to the pay plan for the Sheriff's Department, Jail, Communications Center, and Fire Marshall to the proposed 2023-2024 Wilkes County Budget.

Chairman Elmore asked their thoughts on the Rescue Squad's request at the last work session. He noted EMS is adding 4 staff and an ambulance and he thinks they need to hold off and see how this works out and whether there is still a need. After a brief discussion, the Board agreed they need to hold off on this request.

ADJOURN – The Budget Work Session of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners adjourned at 3:48 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Gideon Keith Elmore, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: June 20, 2023