



# Chatham County, NC

## Meeting Minutes

### Board of Commissioners

---

Wednesday, January 12, 2022

9:00 AM

Agriculture & Conference Center

---

#### Board of Commissioners Retreat

**Present:** 4 - Chair Karen Howard, Vice Chair Franklin Gomez Flores, Commissioner Mike Dasher and Commissioner Diana Hales

#### CALL TO ORDER

*Chair Howard called the meeting to order at 9:04am.*

#### BOARD PRIORITIES

[21-4150](#)

Ground Rules

**Attachments:**     [Ground Rules PPT](#)

*Courtney Cooper-Lewter reviewed the ground rules for the retreat.*

[21-4151](#)

Chatham County Schools

*Dr. Anthony Jackson gave a presentation to the Board.*

*Dr. Jackson thanked the Board and the staff for the ground rules just presented. He appreciated those rules and also appreciated the opportunity to share information today with the commissioners. Dr. Jackson said it was not an easy time to be a superintendent or an educator. His job was one of the top four most difficult jobs to fill. He had been on the job for six months and the school district had done a deep dive of the constituency of the district's desires and needs. He has had over one hundred meetings since his arrival in Chatham County and lots of communication was happening.*

*Chatham County Schools had returned to face-to-face instruction this year and it has been good for the students that the schools has been able to stay open. There were only two clusters of students since school started thanks to the cautious approach to the pandemic. The kids wanted to be with their friends and teachers so that had been the number one priority. Virtual academy had over two hundred students enrolled. Chatham Grove's enrollment was growing faster than anticipated. Seaforth High School opened for ninth and tenth grades.*

*The Central Services Office has started construction. The high speed ten gigabytes*

*project had been completed. The performance of the schools has demonstrated the excellent job of the teachers and staff. There was a one hundred percent graduation rate of early college affiliated with The Innovation Project. The smart bus initiative tracked kids from the time they get on the bus to the time they get off. Chatham County was designated as one of the districts to pilot that initiative. National Board-Certified teachers increased in the district. The Board of Education recognized at the state conference. The district was one of two districts in the state recognized for the fine arts. Dual Language means bi-literate, not just bi-lingual. Students received instruction in Spanish as well as content.*

*One-on-one learning was leveraged with technology as a teaching tool. It did not mean students were doing remote learning. Dr. Jackson looked to see who was not at the table. The disconnected youth needed re-engagement. The calendar restrictions were still an issue. The calendar law restricted how many days could be added to the schedule for the training for the teachers. Testing was a requirement and there was nothing to account for the COVID pandemic days missed, remote learning, and more.*

*Fourth and fifth grade students were learning gaming to inspire them to look at gaming and other new technologies that were providing job opportunities in the triangle.*

*The market for teachers had shifted. Guilford County offered a thirty thousand dollar signing bonus. People left to drive trucks and made three times as much income. The market had changed.*

*Chair Howard asked if it was still a legislative goal to change the calendar law. Dr. Jackson said yes but with remote learning the calendar was a non-starter right now.*

*Commissioner Hales asked if expansion of school safety training was needed for students or teachers. Dr. Jackson stated all of the above. Dr. Jackson said the students did a great job reporting, but parents and teachers also needed training.*

*Chair Howard liked the fact that the district wanted to educate the workforce of tomorrow.*

*Chair Howard stated the importance of educating teachers. There was a need for community college programs for moms who want to get back in the work force. The County needed to focus on the arts. All of that excellence was leaving the county. Dr. Jackson said dance and drama were in some schools but not all schools.*

*The district was looking to correct that. There were some small spaces where those programs could incubate and grow. The Advancement Via Individual Determination non-profit college readiness system was probably the most tried and true program in Chatham. Parents wanted to know what schools had the International Baccalaureate and the Reserve Officer Training Corps programs that were a competition issue with surrounding districts. The district had to talk about those programs as more people moved to this area. We cannot continue to lose students and families to our neighboring counties. Dr. Jackson said our kids should be able to find their way in either academics, arts, or athletics.*

*Tony Messer continued the presentation.*

*Mr. Messer said one million dollars when looked at "buying" teachers would get the district some teachers. Chair Howard said twelve teachers. Mr. Messer said there were around thirteen points with three teachers. The district is funded locally in excess of*

*eighty teachers outside what the state allotted with the help of the Board of Commissioners. Half the districts did not get any teachers from Board of Commissioners. The other districts only received what the state had allotted.*

*Thank you on behalf of the school administration. If it were not for the county funding the district would definitely be at the bottom of per pupil funding.*

*Due to the increase in teacher pay with the state budget, the supplement would increase since it was based on a flat rate and a percentage of salary.*

*Mr. Messer and Dr. Jackson thanked the Board of Commissioners for the relationship and getting the supplement out in front of this issue.*

*Commissioner Hales asked if the central services building would be on the school's broadband and could other county facilities in that location be connected. Mr. LaMontagne said the County had fiber out there due to the County buildings already out there. The schools had their own fiber connections just as the County had to have their own connections.*

*Dr. Jackson concluded the presentation.*

*The relationship between the Board of Education and Board of Commissioners was the envy of this state. This kind of relationship did not occur in many other places. Chair Howard agreed that people were always amazed at the relationship between the two boards when she spoke to others throughout the state. Mr. LaMontagne thanked Dr. Jackson, his staff and the Board of Education.*

*Vice Chair Gomez Flores asked where the County stood with the feasibility study with the school gyms. Mr. Blice provided a document that was presented to the Board of Education yesterday. The first recommendation was to replace the facilities. This option could possibly save four to five million dollars by the replacement instead of renovating it. This allowed the schools to use the current facility until the new facility was built. They would lose that space with renovation. Ms. West asked what the total cost for option four was. It would cost thirteen million dollars for all three gyms.*

*Chair Howard asked if state lottery funds could be used for the gyms. Mr. Messer said the district could still apply for the funds because the gym space could potentially be a multipurpose space. Mr. Thompson said the recent changes to the tier system have changed so that the County may now be able to apply for some grant funding that was previously unavailable. Some of the staff would like to discuss it more with the district because there was a deadline of March 15th.*

*Mr. Butts said a fifteen percent match would be required for those funds.*

*Mr. LaMontagne said this was great news from the state legislature.*

[21-4152](#)

## Overview of Budget & Financial Policies

**Attachments:**    [Budget Process](#)  
                              [Financial Policy](#)

*Budget Analyst Lisa West gave a presentation to the Board.*

*Chair Howard asked if the school's expansion was part of the County's expansion*

request. Ms. West said the schools had made a request. Mr. Butts said anything related to central services would be a continuation. Expansion was something new and not something already agreed to like a building. Programs were expansion because they were new and cannot happen without increased funding.

Ms. West said equity was a new criteria added for consideration with the budget planning process.

Vice Chair Gomez Flores asked if department heads could give a presentation on what they requested and how the funds would be used. Mr. LaMontagne explained the process. Commissioner Hales suggested educational presentations from departments throughout the year so that the public understood the functions of different departments. Chair Howard said this would need to be very intentional and if it was for the public it needed to be located in a place that people could find anytime.

Vice Chair Gomez Flores said the departments could present to the board and it could be uploaded to a Youtube channel.

Chair Howard said this would need to be helpful for the residents and practical for staff. Mr. LaMontagne said a lot of this information is on the County website, but he would reach out to the department heads and follow up with the commissioners with some options and feedback from staff.

## [21-4153](#)

### Heads Up Items and CIT Updates

**Attachments:** [FinalFY23HeadsUpBOCRetreatpresentation](#)

Stephanie Watkins Cruz gave a presentation to the Board.

Commissioner Dasher said some services were at an unacceptable level and needed to be thought about when funding and expansions were considered. Ms. Watkins Cruz said staff also felt this and she would mention some of the causes for delayed services. Mr. LaMontagne said staff were working on solutions.

Vice Chair Gomez Flores asked where the County was with translation services from ARPA funding. Ms. Lewter said she would go into detail about that later today.

Commissioner Hales asked how many employees the County had. Carolyn Miller said five hundred and fifteen full-time employees. This number did not reflect vacancies of about sixty. Commissioner Hales said she was encouraged by re-evaluating the CITs. She was impressed there had even been activity among the teams during COVID and the cyber incident. Vice Chair Gomez Flores asked if the County participated in job fairs.

The County has participated in many job fairs and has recruited several people recently.

## [21-4154](#)

### Trends Affecting Next Year's Budget

**Attachments:** [All trends](#)

Ms. West gave a presentation to the Board (presentation attached).

Ms. West said Chatham County was now collecting sales tax from Amazon.com.

Commissioner Dasher asked about ideas around interest rates. Darrell Butts said it did look like the federal government would make a move this calendar year to increase interest rates. Mr. LaMontagne said the County's rate was locked in at a low rate. Ms. West said this was because of the County's bond rating.

Vice Chair Gomez Flores asked if there were any suggestions or thoughts about establishing a mechanism to encourage residents to spend money in the county. Ms. West said the sales tax reported by the state and it did not break down by individual spending. Mr. Butts said Chatham has a lower sales tax rate than other surrounding counties. Chair Howard said that was an admirable goal. Mr. LaMontagne said more commercial development would help.

## [21-4155](#)

### ARPA Prioritization Tool, Community Engagement, & Discussion

**Attachments:**     [APRA BOC Update 1.18.22](#)

Courtney Cooper-Lewter gave a presentation to the Board.

The deadlines with ARPA funds have to be committed by December 31, 2024 and funds need to be used by December 31, 2026 or the funds will have to be paid back.

Ms. Lewter said there were three ways for the public to provide input. Public input would be collected at the Board of Commissioners meetings, ARPA public engagement sessions, and the online survey. Public Input on ARPA at the February 21st and March 21st BOC meetings would be a specific agenda item where the public could comment. Speakers would not speak at the regular public input session. There may be additional interpreters at the public engagement sessions in addition to Ms. Lewter.

Chair Howard thought there needed to be two northeast meetings because of how engaged that area was and due to the population in that area.

Vice Chair Gomez asked if events could be scheduled on Facebook or social media.

Chair Howard asked if the County was getting input from mental health experts and communities, like the arts, that could benefit mental health. Stephanie Watkins-Cruz said it was going to come up in the CITs and also at these engagement meetings. Mr. LaMontagne said the guiding principles of ARPA would need to be remembered and more information was needed for immediate programs, not long-term programs because the funding would go away.

Commissioner Hales asked if the County had other social media accounts besides Facebook. Lindsay Ray said the County had Twitter and NextDoor accounts. Chair Howard asked if there was a TikTok account. Ms. Ray said the County could only have accounts on platforms that could be archived for retention purposes.

Commissioner Dasher asked if some funds could be held for future needs. Mr. LaMontagne said staff had talked about that and would be looking at that. Prioritization would be key.

Mr. LaMontagne said there may be a need to have some one-on-one meetings with the commissioners to go through the details before bringing the final recommendation to a public meeting.

*There was discussion about the process of appointing the interim district four commissioner.*

*Commissioner Hales asked for a COVID update on February 7th Board of Commissioner meeting.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**A motion was made by Commissioner Diana Hales, seconded by Commissioner Mike Dasher, that the meeting was adjourned. The motion carried by the following vote:**

**Aye:** 4 - Chair Howard, Vice Chair Gomez Flores, Commissioner Dasher, and Commissioner Hales