

## **HIGHLAND COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

### **MINUTES**

#### **WORK SESSION – January 17, 2024**

The Highland County Board of Supervisors held its monthly work session on January 17, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. at the Highland Modular Conference Center, 89 Highland Center Drive, Monterey, Virginia 24465.

<b>PRESENT:</b>	<b>ABSENT:</b>	<b>STAFF / GUESTS:</b>
<b>Henry A. Budzinski, Jr.</b>		Jerri Botkin, Assistant County Admin.
<b>Harry B. Sponaugle</b>		Melissa A. Dowd, County Attorney
<b>Paul S. Triple</b>		Nicholas J. Fialo, IV, EMS Chief
		R.W. Kelly, Sheriff
		18 members of the public
		18 individuals online

Chairman Budzinski called the meeting to order and thanked Ronald Wimer for continuing to staff the virtual broadcast of the Board meetings.

#### **EMS Presentation**

EMS Chief Nicholas Fialo provided a Department staffing report showing 8 full-time employees as of February 1, 2024. Chief Fialo advised the Board that call volumes are steadily increasing in the County.

Chief Fialo presented the Board with an option for local oxygen delivery to the Highland County Emergency Medical Services and The Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad. Chief Fialo was directed to communicate with The Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad to determine if this was feasible for the County.

Chief Fialo asked to purchase some items for 701 to make it road-ready. The Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad and Emergency Services Coordinator, Harley Gardner, offered to provide supplies that they had on hand to save the county money if they had the supplies available. Chairman Budzinski directed Chief Fialo to work with other groups to see what could be obtained through this process.

Chief Fialo then discussed the Operational Medical Director contract with Dr. Asher Brand, whose draft contract includes a significant increase in his salary. Chairman Budzinski directed Chief Fialo to contact Dr. Brand to attend a closed session meeting on February 6, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. to discuss this contract.

Chief Fialo then stated his opinion that all EMS agencies in the County need to be under one license. He said, typically, paid agencies hold the DERA (Designated Emergency Response Agency) license for billing purposes and volunteer agencies keep their NON-DERA license to retain their identities and abilities to apply for 501(C)3 grants, which are not available to the County Department. Supervisor Triple advised he would

like to see what comes out of the Emergency Medical Services Comprehensive Plan prior to making any decisions on this matter.

Chief Fialo expressed his frustration to the Board of problems he has had with the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad concerning the sharing of information. Chief Fialo used a curse word to refer to HCVRS Captain Deborah Tribble. Supervisor Tribble took direct offense to Chief Fialo's comments and rose from his seat. Chief Fialo then also rose from his seat. Chairman Budzinski intervened and asked both parties to take their seats, which they did. Chairman Budzinski stated the EMS Chief, representatives from the Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad, representatives from the Bolar Volunteer Rescue Squad and Dan Hamilton should meet to work together on any issues they are currently encountering.

### **Old Business**

#### **County Water Restriction**

Mrs. Botkin advised the Board that a motion was needed to lift the current water restriction for Highland County. Vice-Chairman Sponaugle made the motion and Supervisor Tribble seconded it. The motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

#### **PRESENT**

Chairman Budzinski  
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle  
Supervisor Tribble

#### **VOTE**

Yes  
Yes  
Yes

### **Public Comment on the Proposed EMS Comprehensive Plan**

**Dan Hamilton, EMS Comprehensive Plan Volunteer-** Mr. Hamilton Introduced himself as having 35 years of Emergency Medical Services experience and would love to help facilitate the agencies.

**John Montgomery, President, Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad-**He has over 10 years of experience in HCVRS. He hopes to simplify the command structure and to meet with Chief Fialo as soon as possible to work out any previous issues. He stated that what was most important to him, whether a Department person or a volunteer, is that people treat each other respectfully and provide the best care for our patients.

**Deborah Tribble, Captain, Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad-** She is happy to get this worked out for the County so we are able to provide the best care no matter if you are paid or not.

**Matt Ratcliffe, President, Bolar Volunteer Rescue Squad-**He stated that years ago Chris Vernovai assisted Bolar with getting a unit and a license in Bolar after being told that Highland County Volunteer Rescue Squad would not place a unit in their area. He understands that all EMS agencies operating in the County may have to all start billing for services but he would like a guarantee that it stays as soft billing.

**Chief Fialo, EMS Chief, Highland County Department of Emergency Services-**  
He stated that he came from a volunteer aspect with 23 years of experience as both a paid EMS provider and a volunteer. He stated his priority of reducing the response time for an agency reaching a patient. He would like to see Department staff and volunteer staff leaving a building in a unit within 2 minutes. He also apologized to Supervisor Tribble and Captain Deborah Tribble for his outburst and stated he had been under a lot of stress recently. He stated his intent that Emergency Medical Services for Highland County should move forward.

**New Business**

**Update on 2024 Reassessment**

Mrs. Botkin advised the Board that she and the Commissioner of the Revenue, Mrs. Yvonne Wimer, are contacting individuals to serve on the County Board of Equalization. Mrs. Botkin advised the Board it would have a recommended list of eligible residents to be selected by the Board and then recommended to the Highland County Circuit Court for action, at the February 6, 2024, meeting.

**Appointment for McDowell Water System**

Supervisor Tribble made the motion to appoint Chairman Budzinski to execute any necessary documents and oversee this system. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Sponaugle and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

**Appointment to the Bath Highland Network Authority**

This item has been tabled.

**Appointment of a Board Member as Highland County's Director of Emergency Management**

Mrs. Botkin advised the Board that this Supervisor would be the contact for emergency situations such as natural disasters and declared emergencies and would work closely with the Local Emergency Planning Committee. Supervisor Tribble made the motion to appoint Chairman Budzinski as the Director of Emergency Management. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Sponaugle and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

### **Bonding of Board Members**

Mrs. Botkin advised that each January Board members must be bonded in the amount on \$1000.00 each. Mrs. Botkin then had each supervisor sign the necessary paperwork.

### **Budget Timeline**

Mrs. Botkin provided the following budget timeline to the Board:

2/1/2024—Budgets due to County Administrator

2/6/2024--Budget handouts provided to Board Members for Review

2/21/2024-Review general fund budget and schedule additional work session meetings for the Board to view department presentations

Departments that typically make a presentation to the Board:

1. Highland County Public Library
2. Highland County Sheriff's Office
3. Department of Social Services
4. Department of Emergency Medical Services
5. Virginia Department of Health
6. Blue Ridge Community College
7. Commissioner of the Revenue
8. Highland County Public Schools

3/26/2024—Dr. Maerz (tentative) The School Board does not have its budget work sessions until 3/18/2024, and 3/25/2024.

\*\*The budget must be adopted by the end of April so the Commissioner of the Revenue and the Treasurer can get the tax tickets out.

### **Reimbursement Request Policy**

County Attorney Dowd presented the Board with a policy to review. Chairman Budzinski asked the Board to review this policy so it can be approved, amended or denied at the February 6, 2024, meeting.

### **Highland County Credit Card Policy**

County Attorney Dowd presented the Board with a policy to review. Chairman Budzinski asked the Board to review this policy so it can be approved, amended or denied at the February 6, 2024, meeting.

### **Economic Development Authority Housing Study**

Chairman Budzinski provided an update on the Draft report that is available for comment. Chairman Budzinski stated he has some concerns regarding short term rental property.

**Betty Mitchell**, who appeared virtually, clarified that the study included Bath and Highland County and that the draft recommendation period has ended. The Economic Development Authority will review the results of the regional housing study at its January 22, 2024, meeting.

### **Virginia Electoral Board Association Annual Conference**

Mrs. Botkin presented a request to the Board for the Registrar, her Assistant and the members of the Electoral Board to register and attend the Virginia Electoral Board Association Annual Conference at The Homestead in Hot Springs, VA. Mrs. Botkin advised the Board that there are annual requirements for training each year and this Conference attendance was in the Registrar's FY24 budget. Supervisor Tribble made a motion to allow the Registrar and necessary individuals to attend this Conference. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Sponaugle and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

### **Training request**

Mrs. Botkin presented a request from Sheriff R. W. Kelly for Sergeant G.D. Hull to attend an Armorer's Course and Investigator R.D. Vandevander to attend an investigation course. Supervisor Tribble made the motion to approve the registration and payment for this training. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Sponaugle and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

### **Open Public Comments**

**Harley Gardner, Emergency Services Coordinator**, stated he has registered for the upcoming Virginia Department of Emergency Management Annual Symposium in Newport News, Virginia March 19-21, 2024. Mr. Gardner advised the Board the Conference amount was in his FY24 budget. Supervisor Tribble made the motion to approve this reimbursement. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Sponaugle and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

**Dr. Drew Maerz, Superintendent of Highland County Public Schools**, informed the Board of the upcoming school board meeting on January 26, 2024 and invited them to attend.

**Closed Session**

Vice-Chairman Sponaugle made a motion to go into closed session pursuant to Virginia Code §2.2-3711(A)(1), personnel, to discuss the performance, discipline and possible dismissal of a specific employee and Virginia Code §2.2-3711(A)(29) to discuss the County Attorney contract.

Supervisor Tribble seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

County Attorney Dowd advised Tammy Minnigh with the Recorder if any action was taken, she would be notified.

The Board entered its closed session.

After the closed session, Chairman Budzinski reconvened the Board meeting in an open meeting. Supervisor Tribble moved that the Board certified to the best of each member's knowledge, only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements and only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which the closed meeting was convened were heard, discussed or considered in the meeting by the Board of Supervisors.

Vice-Chairman Sponaugle seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

Supervisor Tribble made a motion to accept County Attorney Dowd's current letter of Agreement as her contract as the County Attorney. Vice-Chairman Sponaugle seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

Supervisor Tribble made a motion to accept Ms. Roberta A. Lambert's resignation effective January 17, 2024, and allow her to transfer her County cell phone number to a personal plan and to give her the iPad she has been using. Vice-Chairman Sponaugle seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>VOTE</u>
Chairman Budzinski	Yes
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle	Yes
Supervisor Tribble	Yes

In further business, the Board also agreed to have the EMS Chief report directly to the Chairman of the Board at this time. Vice-Chairman Sponaugle made the motion to have Chief Fialo report directly to Chairman Budzinski. This motion was seconded by Supervisor Tribble and the motion carried unanimously with the following vote:

PRESENT

Chairman Budzinski  
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle  
Supervisor Tribble

VOTE

Yes  
Yes  
Yes

Chairman Budzinski directed County Attorney Dowd to draw up a letter of Reprimand for EMS Chief Fialo due to his outburst in the meeting. This reprimand will be presented to EMS Chief Fialo by Chairman Budzinski and be placed permanently in his personnel file. Vice-Chairman Sponaugle made the motion for County Attorney Dowd to draw up a letter of reprimand for EMS Chief Fialo. The motion carried with the following vote:

PRESENT

Chairman Budzinski  
Vice-Chairman Sponaugle  
Supervisor Tribble

VOTE

Yes  
Yes  
ABSTAIN

Supervisor Tribble moved to adjourn the Board meeting, Vice-Chairman Sponaugle seconded the motion, and it passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jerri Botkin, Asst. County Administrator

Minutes of the January 17, 2024, work session are approved:

2/16/2024  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman Henry A. Budzinski, Jr.