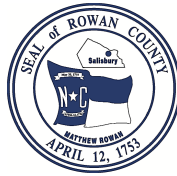


Greg Edds, Chairman
Jim Greene, Vice- Chairman
Mike Caskey
Judy Klusman
Craig Pierce



Aaron Church, County Manager
Sarah Pack, Clerk to the Board
John W. Dees, II, County Attorney

Rowan County Board of Commissioners

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MINUTES OF ANNUAL PLANNING RETREAT/WORK SESSION OF THE ROWAN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

February 17, 2024 – 10:00 AM

J. NEWTON COHEN, SR. ROOM

J. NEWTON COHEN, SR. ROWAN COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Present:

Greg Edds, Chairman
Jim Greene, Vice-Chairman (exited where noted)
Judy Klusman, Commissioner
Craig Pierce, Commissioner (entered where noted)

Absent:

Mike Caskey, Commissioner

County Manager Aaron Church, Clerk to the Board Sarah Pack, and Finance Director Anna Bumgarner were also present. County Attorney Jay Dees was absent.

Chairman Edds convened the meeting at 10:13 a.m. Chaplain Michael Taylor provided a solemnizing prayer. Chairman Edds led the Pledge of Allegiance.

INTRODUCTION

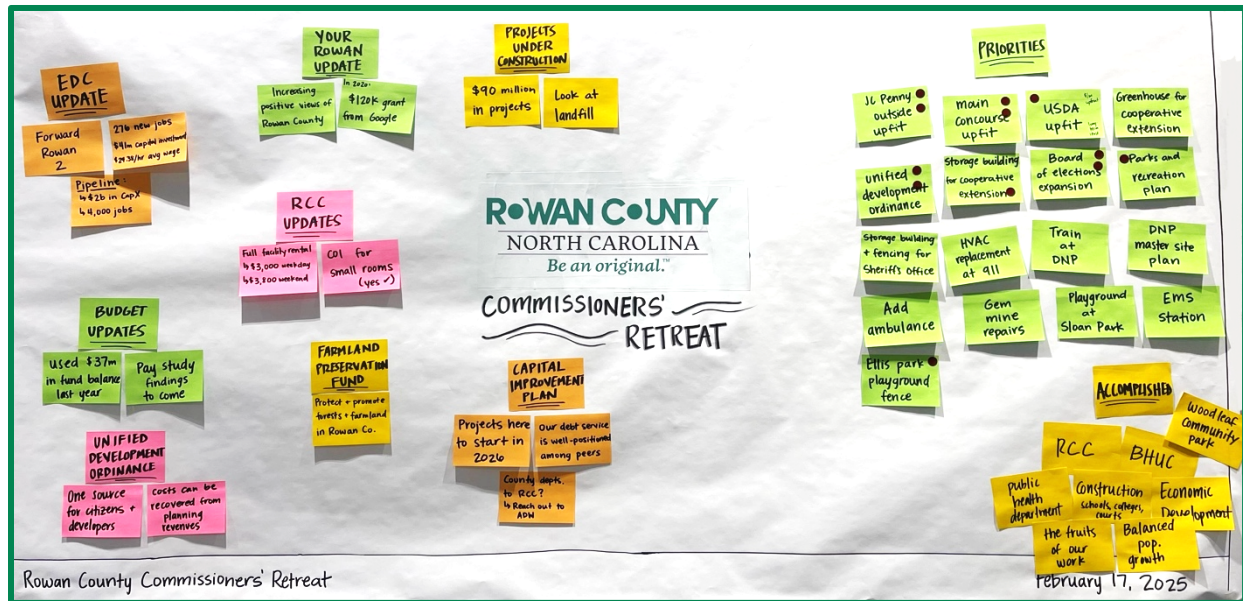
The Rowan County Board of Commissioners convened on February 17th, 2025 for its annual retreat. The retreat was held at the soon-to-open Rowan Community Center and served to update Commissioners on relevant Rowan County topics and get a sense of Commissioners' priorities for the coming fiscal year. The retreat was facilitated by FountainWorks, Inc.

This meeting summary, prepared by Facilitator Emily Wilson of FountainWorks, with minor edits by the Clerk to the Board, captures the key points of discussion during the retreat.

This summary provides information on what was covered throughout the retreat. Commissioners' priorities are included below; for the full list of possible priorities, please see the Prioritization section.

- JC Penny outside upfit (2 votes)
- Main concourse upfit (2 votes)
- Board of elections expansion (2 votes)
- Unified development ordinance (2 votes)
- USDA upfit (1 vote)
- Storage building for cooperative expansion (1 vote)
- Parks and recreation plan (1 vote)
- Ellis Park playground fence (1 vote)

In addition to the above priorities, Commissioners also reviewed the recommended RCC fee schedule (to be approved at a later meeting) and asked County Manager Aaron Church to reach out to ADW Architects to discuss adding space for Rowan County departments to the RCC.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Emily Wilson, Fountainworks

Before beginning the updates from Rowan County staff and community partners, the Commissioners took a moment to reflect on the County's accomplishments over the past year. Commissioners highlighted the following accomplishments:

- Rowan Community Center (RCC)
- Public Health Department
- Construction of schools, colleges, and courts
- Balanced population growth
- Economic development
- Woodleaf Community Park
- Behavioral Health Urgent Care
- We've reaped the fruits of all our past work and plans

ROWAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL UPDATE

Rod Crider, President and CEO, and Scott Shelton, Vice President

AT A GLANCE

- Last year, Rowan County saw:
 - o 276 new jobs
 - o \$41M in capital investment
 - o \$24.38/hour average wage

- The Forward Rowan 2 campaign is starting, building on the success of the first Forward Rowan campaign
- Currently in the EDC's pipeline:
 - o \$2B in capital investment
 - o 4,000 jobs

What We Heard

- Goals
 - o 500 new jobs – 276 actual
 - o \$70M investment – \$41M actual
 - o \$16.06/hour average wage – actual \$24.38/hour
- Notable wins
 - o AMREP expansion
 - o Ever Home Plastics
 - o Westlake investment
- Forward Rowan Campaign
 - o Public/private partnership model for business partners to join us in economic growth efforts; prior, all funding came from the County and municipalities
 - Now, 25-30% of funding comes from the private sector
 - o Goals during Forward Rowan:
 - 2,500 jobs – 2,805 actual
 - \$350M in capital investment – \$1.02B actual
 - \$16.06/hour average wage – \$22.55/hour actual
- Project Activity
 - o Summary
 - The EDC had the same number of leads as in 2023 (162) but qualified more businesses in 2024 and had an increase in company visits.
 - o Existing BREs
 - 60 company visits, half of project activity was with existing
 - o Site Identification
 - 2 sites accepted into Duke Energy Site Readiness Program
 - Funded Phase I Environmental Reports for potential industrial sites in Cleveland, East Spencer, and Salisbury
 - Working with partners to identify potential candidates for Build Ready Sites program
 - o Developer Interest:
 - ~10 sites getting interest from developers for industrial space around I-85
 - o Incentive Policy Change
 - In 2024, EDC worked to revise incentive policy
 - City approved new policy approved in February 2025; now utilizes a scoring system similar to the County's current incentive policy
 - o In our current pipeline:
 - 4,000 jobs
 - \$2B in capital investment

- This is thanks to space and buildings available in Rowan County; most companies don't want to wait 12-18 months, so our existing inventory makes us competitive.
- Talent Attraction & Development
 - Launched new and improved Rowan County job portal (workinrowan.com)
 - Conducted expanded Manufacturing Day activities including a Women in Manufacturing panel and Manufacturing Appreciation lunch
 - Expanded Concierge Relocation Guide services
 - Conducted the bi-annual Manufacturing Wage Survey
 - Convened our Talent Task Force comprised of local employers quarterly to discuss common and emerging issues while promoting collaboration
 - Supported the Rowan Education Collaborative to align education with business
 - Continued participation with workforce development groups including Rowan Education Collaborative, RSS CTE Advisory group and Workforce Alliance
- Brand Identity & Storytelling
 - Conducted multi-channel marketing campaign (print, social, direct mail, email, public relations, virtual, and website targeted to the AgBioscience industry)
 - Grew our online social media presence and subscribers to the bi-weekly EDC Update Newsletter to stakeholders and other interested parties
 - Acquired video equipment and produced several videos, including a new video news magazine
 - Launched a new podcast "Prosperity through Progress" to highlight economic activity and local companies in Rowan County
- High-Performance Service Delivery
 - We launched a second, five-year Forward Rowan campaign to extend the positive results achieved from Forward Rowan 1 with a goal of \$1.5M in public sector support.
 - Currently sit at 92% of goal
 - 17 new companies have joined the effort
 - 16 companies increased their investment in the effort
 - One staff member completed their eligibility to sit for national certification and two others entered the process of becoming a North Carolina certified economic developer.
 - The EDC continued a seven-year streak of positive financial results, ending the year with a \$39,000 surplus.

Questions:

- Do we know how many residents are in and out of Rowan County each day?
 - We are sending about 7,000 more people out.
 - As we demonstrate we are a business-friendly community, the businesses of those 7,000 people are prime targets to move closer to home.
- Any ideas for how we can help folks access transportation?
 - It is a challenge; monitoring it is the most we can do without spending tons of money. There are private actors working on some things, but not necessarily point-to-point and not with the correct timing.

Council Comments:

- The County's permitting process has put us in a great position, though we do still see some struggles.
- How can we help our municipalities? They often have a different philosophy around economic development and fast permitting. What can we do as a County to encourage them? The County will do anything we can to help.
- A lot of young people want to get a job but can't get a car and they can't get a car until they get a job. How can we help that transportation challenge? We need to continue to try to help both the childcare and the transportation issue, especially for young folks trying to get started.
- Childcare is very expensive!

YOUR ROWAN UPDATE

Mike Miller, President, Miller Davis Agency

What We Heard

- The Rowan County Re-Branding was born out of an increase in the importance of social media to the community.
- We focus all of our efforts around 8 important attraction areas for Rowan County:
 - o Attractions
 - o Green Space
 - o The arts
 - o High rock lake
 - o Business community
 - o Health care
 - o Education
 - o County municipalities
- How we tell our story:
 - o YourRowan.com
 - o Digital marketing (social media, blog writing, Google pay-per-click)
 - o Rowan County personas (individuals who share their stories and perspectives around Rowan County)
- We are well-positioned geographically; we are centrally located, close to Charlotte, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and even Raleigh but have the calm and quiet for folks to come back to.
- Secured \$120k grant through Google

Council Comments

- We started this initiative a number of years ago and are so happy to have gone with a local firm.
- Thank you for everything you have done, teaching us to reach out and let others know what a jewel we have.

RCC OPERATIONS & FEE SCHEDULE

Nick Aceves, Parks and Recreation Director, and Megan Simpson, Event Center Manager

What We Heard

- Considerations:
 - o We toured a number of facilities; none are the same as the RCC
 - o Staffing needs
 - o Add-on pricing
 - o Existing JC Penny space
- Recommended cost to rent full RCC facility
 - o Weekday: \$3,000
 - o Weekend: \$3,800
 - o Non-profits will receive a 50% discount
- COI for small rooms
 - o We are starting to receive meeting inquiries for the small rooms; is that something we need to require? Or maybe a different damage deposit?
 - For businesses and non-profits, they have insurance policies so that isn't too difficult.
 - Yes, we do want to require them. If it becomes a problem, we can revisit that.

Commissioner Pierce entered the meeting at 11:36 a.m.

Questions

- Did anyone have seasonal pricing?
 - o No, only weekend/weekday
- Why offer rentals in 12-hour blocks?
 - o This facility has higher needs for staffing and the turnover needed between events.
- What do we do for folks who want to set up ahead of time?
 - o They can come in the day before for setup for an additional \$150 fee, but any actual events that would require full staffing would be at regular price
- Who is exempt from fees?
 - o RCCC, EDC, Republican/Democratic Committees, school system can use the space once per quarter
- Is this a full bar charge or just wine and beer?
 - o It is a full bar option though there are a number of requirements (e.g., bartender certifications, ABC permits, insurance)
- What if people want to bring their families to help provide food?
 - o If they use our professional kitchen equipment, they will need a certificate of liability from their insurance carrier. If they are just bringing things pre-made and setting it up, they can do that.

CURRENT PROJECTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Craig Powers, Director of Engineering and Environmental Services

What We Heard

- **Rowan County Jail:** bids came back at \$1.6m; could get that down on \$1.4m
- **Pest control system expansion (Landfill):** completed

- **Health Department generator:** switching it out; using generators from emergency management to get us through the next two years
- **High Rock Lake debris:** done with the research phase
 - o This is a Rowan County project
- **Library roof:** Completed with some hiccups; more tiles were damaged than expected
- **Crawford Building:** Under planned review with the City of Salisbury; once that is completed, we will put it out to bid
- **Landfill expansion:** looking at doubling the life of the landfill; because we are a regional landfill, we have increased our tonnage over 10% which means we need to re-permit the entire site (this requires a community outreach and permitting process)
 - o Current lifespan is 2050, could double that with permitting
 - o Will have to pay Army Corps of Engineers \$2m (we have those funds, we are waiting for the time to use them)
 - o If we restricted use to Rowan County and it stopped being a regional landfill, we wouldn't have to go through permitting
- **Landfill natural gas:** Going out to bid soon
 - o This project is to recapture of methane to sell back to the pipeline
- **Ag Building upfit:** Completed
- **Health Department:** Completed
- **Ag Center:** Finishing up punch list; waiting on furniture which is expected to arrive mid-to-late April
- **South Branch Main Library carpet:** starting work soon
- **ADA Updates:** hired architect to look at updates, we can do a lot in house
- **Playground:** Demolition is complete of the old structure and the playground should be complete in the next couple of weeks.
- **Shelter at Wood Leaf Park:** Shelter kit has been ordered and the project should start in three or four weeks.
- **Airport generator:** purchased and on-site, waiting on installation
- **ADA restrooms at airport:** in progress
- **Airport box hangar:** Almost complete
- **Public safety hangar:** Starting to do some site development, getting the pad ready
- **Storage building at airport:** building area for maintenance equipment, in progress
- **Localizer replacement:** in progress
- **Water and sewer extension:** Water line is in; working on sewer to go to public safety hangar

Questions

- Does our landfill have enough land around it?
 - o We have worked through about half the phases, but we are now taking in more than we have in the past.
- If we stopped serving other communities, how would that impact your budget?
 - o We can look into that.

Council Comments

- It's good that the landfill adds to our revenue, but it uses our asset quicker.

BUDGET UPDATE

Aaron Church, County Manager

What We Heard

- We used \$37m in fund balance last year to balance the budget; \$27m of that was for capital projects expenditures (typical average is \$9-10m).
- In a peer comparison, Rowan County in a really good spot; good debt ratio and fund balance.
- Sales tax has rose steadily since 2016 except last year; our appropriations went down— sales tax revenue did not.
- We are not going to see an increase in sales tax revenue nor in property tax.
- Our budget is decreasing this year; we are not cutting services but are reducing capital expenditures.
- Public safety pay study
 - o We are not too far off from those around us; one of the biggest weaknesses is that our folks aren't moving through the range.
 - o The biggest recommendation is retention pay to all County departments.
 - o Retention pay would be additional 1-3% of annual pay on top of the COLA.
 - o We currently have COLA and longevity (1-5 years is +0.5% each year, 5-10 is +1% each year, and over 10 is +1.5% each year).
- EMS station in China Grove: we paid around \$600k for 2 acres
- Rowan County Buildings & Department Locations
 - o Rowan County has buildings and properties across the County while some Departments are experiencing capacity issues.
 - o To address these capacity issues, the County is going to pursue adding Rowan County office space to the former JC Penny's space of the RCC. This would allow multiple service-centered departments to be conveniently located to the Rowan County community. County staff will be reaching out to ADW Architects about these potential updates.

Commissioner Comments

- The Cooperative Extension greenhouse and storage building will need to be done eventually

FARMLAND PRESERVATION FUND

Ben Knox, Rowan County Soil and Water Conservation District Chairman, and Amy-Lynn Albertson, County Extension Director

What We Heard

- Summary
 - o Rowan County farmlands are routinely threatened by development.
 - o A Preservation Fund would allow a percentage of farmland sales to go back into the fund. The Preservation Fund would be used to support Rowan County farmlands for future generations.
- Why this is important

- When developers buy new land, it sits idle with no development or farming for years.
- In the 2017 Ag Census, Rowan County had 118k acres of farmland; in 2022, that number was 104k acres
- Farmland is being bought, especially around Highway 70 and I-85 and threatens Rowan County's farms.
- Goals:
 - Support measures to protect and promote working forest and farmland in Rowan County.
 - Educate landowners on the benefits of enrolling in Conservation Easement Program to keep land available for agricultural use.
 - Expand Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) and Enhanced Voluntary Agriculture District (EVAD) programs.
 - Develop and conduct programs to assist Rowan County farm and forest landowners with farm transition planning.
 - Promote appreciation and awareness of the benefits of agriculture to Rowan elected officials and citizens.
 - Expand and support youth agricultural education programs.

Questions

- Who would administer this?
 - The Rowan County Soil and Water Conservation Board

Council Comments

- With the costs of these things, it may take a few budget cycles to get it all accounted for. With the rising cost of land, we need to move forward on the land for the new station.

UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

Ed Muire, Planning and Development Director

What We Heard

- A unified development ordinance (UDO) is a comprehensive plan for how the County wants to develop its land.
- A UDO consolidates regulations and standards from various plans, including land use plans, into one single document.
- With Commissioner support, County staff will move forward in developing Rowan County's UDO.

Questions

- I'm getting calls on people frustrated by sprawling developments; would this impact the sprawling developments that are popping up or give us an opportunity to see those projects?
 - Yes, we can determine what should go in the UDO.
- The communities around us are annexing—how does this relate to that?

- Those municipalities have a 3-mile reach outside of their corporate limits that they can annex; as they do that it leaves a tentacle effect where they skip over some County properties to reach the areas they do want to annex.

Vice-Chairman Greene exited the meeting at 1:50 p.m.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Siobhan Allen, Assistant to the County Manager/Management Analyst

What We Heard

- Rowan County departments made a number of requests for the next fiscal year through 2034.
- These are not approved requests, but are wish lists from the different departments.
- Some of the proposed projects for next fiscal year include:
 - Storage building for the Cooperative Extension's agriculture equipment
 - Computer-aided dispatch (CAD) upgrades for Emergency Services
 - Storage facility and fenced-in storage yard for Sheriff's Office
 - Various airport infrastructure upgrades

Questions

- What is the Ellis Park revitalization?
 - There is a ~15 year lifeline on things and it was built in 2018 so we are looking to 2033

The Board agreed by consensus to request that ADW Architects prepare a draft proposal.

PRIORITIZATION

Emily Wilson, Fountainworks

After hearing the departmental requests for capital improvements, County Commissioners noted which projects they want to be prioritized in the coming budget cycle.

- JC Penny outside upfit (2 votes)
- Main concourse upfit (2 votes)
- Board of elections expansion (2 votes)
- Unified development ordinance (2 votes)
- USDA upfit (1 vote)
- Storage building for cooperative expansion (1 vote)
- Parks and recreation plan (1 vote)
- Ellis Park playground fence (1 vote)
- Greenhouse for Cooperative Extension
- Storage building and fencing for Sheriff's Office
- HVAC replacement at 911
- Train at DNP
- DNP Master Site Plan
- Add ambulance and crew

- Gem mine repairs
- Playground at Sloan Park
- EMS station

At 2:47 p.m. on motion of Klusman, seconded by Pierce, the Board voted 4-0 to adjourn.

This meeting summary, prepared by Facilitator Emily Wilson, with minor edits by the Clerk to the Board, are hereby submitted as the minutes of the Planning Retreat/Work Session.

Sarah Pack, NCCCC
Clerk to the Board