

COUNTY OF BATH, VIRGINIA  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETING  
BATH COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Room 115

Thursday, March 31, 2016, 6:30 p.m. Work Session

At the Work Session of the Board of Supervisors of Bath County, Virginia, Claire A. Collins, Chairperson; Richard B. Byrd, Vice Chairman; Stuart L. Hall; Edward T. Hicklin; Mathew S. Ratcliffe; Lady and Gentlemen Supervisors; and Ashton N. Harrison, County Administrator.

Supervisor Byrd made the motion to reconvene the Board of Supervisors meeting in Room 115 of the Bath County Courthouse. The motion was adopted 5-0.

The meeting began at 4:30 p.m. at Mertz Technical Center as a joint budget work session with the School Board. Upon conclusion of the joint budget work session the Board moved to the Courthouse for an advertised meeting to receive public comment and to reconsider Preservation Bath's request to apply for the 2016-17 State Survey and Planning Cost Share Program.

Claire A. Collins, Chair called the meeting to order.

Mr. Phil Deemer, President, Preservation Bath, said their request closely mirrors the Comprehensive Plan which calls for surveys, historic districts and preservation efforts. Mr. Deemer said the cost share program has been in effect for over 25 years and allows localities to conduct a historic survey and a historic district nomination at a reduction of 50 percent. Mr. Deemer said the administrative work is done in Richmond by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and will not require any additional work by County staff. Mr. Deemer said a historic survey is an architectural survey of properties defined as being at least 50 years old or older. Mr. Deemer said a door to door survey will be conducted and there will be no need for the consultant to enter the home. Property owners will be able to opt out if they do not want to participate. Mr. Deemer said he wanted to make sure that everyone understood that no restrictions would be placed on properties and there are no requirements to rehabilitate ones property. Mr. Deemer explained a historic district enhances tourism and provides economic opportunities for individuals and businesses. Mr. Deemer asked the Board to consider approval of Preservation Bath's request to apply for the 2016-17 State Survey and Planning Cost Share Program and to approve the \$8,000 match in county funds.

Chair Collins opened the floor for comments from the public.

Mr. Jay Trinca, Warm Springs District, said he had addressed the Board several times in the past about the County's small pristine villages like Warm Springs. He encouraged the Board to put in place a philosophy that encourages preservation of the County's villages.

Mr. John Fischer, Warm Springs District, said he would like to take the opportunity to address the perceptions of the County about the ethical and financial aspects of Preservation

Bath's project. He said after reading the application and brushing up on the tax code he said he came to the conclusion that some of the perceptions are actually misperceptions. The first misconception was that the project will contribute to the personal profits of individuals in the County. Mr. Fischer said this is not the case at all, but what the project will do is create infrastructure boxes. Then when it comes time for individuals and businesses to apply for tax credits they will do this on their own but this infrastructure box makes the process easier. No county funds will go to any individual or contractor. Mr. Fischer said if allowable the County could consider using tourism funds for the County's match.

Mr. Pat Haynes, Warm Springs District, said this project brought to mind the Village of Bacova. Mr. Haynes said at one time Bacova was home to one of the largest hardwood lumber mill on the east coast. He said most of the lumber mills structures are gone now but those that remain the company houses, company store, and the red brick barn represent the rich history of the village. He said all this ties into Bath County. He said the core business of Bath County is tourism and tourists love history. He said he strongly supports the application.

Ms. Trisha English and Ms. Barbara Norton, Warm Springs District residents spoke in support of Preservation Bath's application.

Mr. David Jurcak, Cedar Creek District, and General Manager Omni Homestead resort said he supports funding the project but does not support using tourism funds. He said the Comprehensive Plan allows for projects like this and the matching funds should come from the general fund. Mr. Jurcak said the Omni Homestead has been under enormous pressure to preserve the pools and if the Board does not fund this application process allowing for tax credits that could be used for renovations at the pools he would come back to a future Board meeting to ask for \$1.5 million to fund the restoration of the pools.

Mr. John Loeffler, Warm Springs District, said of the approximately \$1.8 million collected in 2015 from the tourism dollars over \$500,000 was collected from transient occupancy tax along with \$691,500 from the food and beverage tax which went to the County's general fund. He urged the Board to support the application and use general funds for the County's match. He said the tourism department can do a tremendous amount with that small amount of money.

Ms. Cynthia Rudnick said Natural Retreats also supports the application.

Mr. Bryan Bruns, Warm Springs District, agreed the project is a good idea and encouraged the Board to be clear about the project. He said state and federal historic districts are different from local historic districts. He said the community does not want local historic districts which restrict property owners. He said there is far more to this project than just tax credits like heritage tourism that brings people here and contributes to the local economy and a renewed appreciation of local history.

Chair Collins closed public comment and asked for comments from Board members.

Supervisor Byrd made a motion to suspend Roberts Rules of Order to allow for discussion by the Board prior to a motion. The motion was adopted 5-0.

Supervisor Ratcliffe said his district covers northern Bath County, Mountain Grove, and Warm Springs. He said yesterday at his district meeting in Warm Springs he had many folks that spoke in favor of Preservation Bath's request. He said that since early this morning he has received calls from a lot of people who told him they do not want their tax dollars used to support this project. Supervisor Ratcliffe said in February he wanted to get a \$25,000 generator to help the people at the retirement home for use when the power went out to help with their oxygen machines and to keep medication from cold. He said he was told then that this was putting money into a private entity and in his opinion this project is no different, and therefore he cannot support Preservation Bath's request.

Supervisor Byrd said he had studied this for a long time and as most of the public knows he and wife purchased the Old Ashwood School which was recently received state historic designation. He said he appreciated Mr. Deemer's group who wrote a letter in support of his application for historic designation. Supervisor Byrd said it took over three years for their application to gain approval and he is sad to say that the many important people sitting here tonight were not there to support his individual application. He said he invited elected officials, and the Chamber of Commerce to come by, they didn't have time. He said he finally got a former County Administrator to sign off on the application. Supervisor Byrd said he is not in favor of using taxpayer funds to fund a community base that includes private citizens. He said the community base in this case encompasses county buildings. He said he also remembered the retirement home and he also remembered back in October a gentleman came in and asked for a set of swings and mulch for the community center in Burnsville and the Board said they could not support it because it was not a county building and the Board could not spend their money there. He said he had been researching the different types of historic designations. He said he has no intention of using taxpayer's money to fund individual's application for historic designation.

Supervisor Hicklin said he fully supported the request.

Supervisor Hall said he had researched the laws in the end they will come back to the County for tax credits to defer taxes. Supervisor Hall said the County continues to lose money on land use and conservation easements and with many working for minimum wage they cannot afford to continue carrying the burden. The budget requests for the upcoming fiscal year is \$2M more in expenditures than revenue. Unless the County can increase revenue everything coming in is already spent. Supervisor Hall said his priorities are to fund schools and public safety. Supervisor Hall stressed the need to carry a fund balance of \$5M to 6M and urged everyone to look and plan ahead.

Chair Collins said she was going to take a different approach to Preservation Bath's request. Chair Collins said she has worked in communities that have state and federal historic districts. They do not provide tax breaks for individual property owners and they do not affect the tax base unless the local people and the local government want to enact that type of local historic districts. Chair Collins said what we are talking about tonight is applying for a grant

where the state does all the work and the County provides a match in funds. The study would set up whether or not the area surveyed could even apply for historic district designation. We have talked about Warm Springs for at least 25 years mainly because of the four historic buildings that the County owns; Sheriff's Office, School Administration Building, Library and Courthouse. The County has considered applying for historic designation for the aforementioned buildings in the past but didn't because we didn't have the expertise in house and because the cost was approximately \$2,500 per structure. She said the County has lost many of its historic buildings over the years. Chair Collins said the Cedar Creek District has lost more historic buildings than any other district. She said she cares about the county and its historic structures and therefore supports this request. Chair Collins said citizens from all backgrounds those born here and those that have moved here care about the County and its history. She said the majority of those that contacted her asked her to support applying for the grant and said it's just like applying for any other grant. Chair Collins said the matching funds are not due until August 2016 so it is not an out of budget request.

Mr. Phil Deemer asked if he could please make a comment before the vote. He said Supervisor Ratcliffe said he got a lot of calls this morning asking him not to support their request. The reason he didn't get calls this morning from supporters is because Supervisor Ratcliffe told Preservation Bath's supporters that he was going to support them so they stopped calling him.

Supervisor Ratcliffe said he also represents the people who called him today. Supervisor Ratcliffe said there is no difference in this request and the request he made to provide a generator at Mountain Crest.

Chair Collins turned the gavel over to the Vice Chair. She said the County is still looking at options for generators at Mountain Crest and it is unfair to compare the request for a generator to the grant application request. Chair Collins said she will continue to support for what is right for the whole community and advocate for everyone in the community not just a select group.

Supervisor Byrd made the motion to not fund the request for application and matching funds of \$8,000 for the 2016-17 State Survey and Planning Cost Share Program, and to vote without further discussion. The motion was adopted 3-2 with Supervisors Byrd, Hall and Ratcliffe voting in favor and Chair Collins and Supervisor Hicklin voting against the motion.

Supervisor Byrd made the motion to move from regular session to work session. The motion was adopted 5-0.

County Administrator Harrison provided an extensive overview of the proposed FY 2017 budget. The County will hold a public hearing on the budget and tax levies on April 12, 2016, at 7 p.m. or as soon thereafter as possible. County Administrator Harrison said if the Board wants to make any significant changes to the budget he would like to know as soon as possible in order to revise his figures.

Supervisor Byrd made the motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was adopted 5-0.

Chairperson Collins adjourned the meeting.

Ordered that this Board do now stand adjourned until 7:00 p.m., April 12, 2016, for the regular monthly meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

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Ashton N. Harrison, Clerk

APPROVED:

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Claire A. Collins, Chairperson