The Board of Commissioners of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, met in Budget/Public Policy Session on Tuesday, March 23, 2021.

Due to the State of North Carolina’s Declaration of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and per NCGS § 166A-19.24, the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners conducted a remote meeting using the WebEx application.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chair George Dunlap and Commissioners Leigh Altman, Patricia “Pat” Cotham, Mark Jerrell, Vilma D. Leake, Laura J Meier, Elaine Powell, Susan Rodriguez- McDowell, and Ella B. Scarborough County Manager Dena R. Diorio County Attorney Tyrone C. Wade Interim Clerk to the Board Kristine M. Smith

Absent: None

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Dunlap, followed by introductions and the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Commissioner Leake was absent until noted in the minutes.

County Manager Dena Diorio said for the County’s public engagement strategy for fiscal year 2022 process invitations were extended to all of the County’s advisory boards to present their priorities to the County commission. She said three boards accepted the invitation, the Women’s Advisory Board, the Air Quality Commission and the Park and Recreation Commission.

21-6746 WOMEN’S ADVISORY BOARD BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS
County Manager Diorio said the Women’s Advisory Board was a 15-member board appointed by the Board of County Commissioners with the mission of promoting critical and emerging needs of women in Mecklenburg County through education and service.

County Manager Diorio introduced Chair Dr. Yolonda Holmes and Vice-Chair Stacey Sandeford-Lyons of the Women's Advisory Board, who gave the presentation regarding the FY2022 budget priorities of the Women's Advisory Board.
“Communities are only as strong as the health of their women.”

-- Michelle Obama
The Urgency of Now: Listening, Learning & Leading

COVID-19

Social and Racial Justice

Mental Health

Five Key Areas

- Mental Health and Mental Well-being
- Childcare Services & Resources for Women
- Employment
- Communication Platforms/Systems
- Community Support (Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution)
Mental Health and Mental Well-being

Findings
- Need for mental health funding, education, and awareness
- Disproportionate access
- Aggravated by Covid-19

Recommendations
- Communication
- Transportation vouchers
- Expansion—Behavioral Health Integration (BHI)
  - Especially within the Crescent

Mental Health/Mental Well-being Information

PATIENT TO MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER RATIO IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NC

350 to 1

Source: County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, County Health Rankings (DataUSA)
Childcare Services & Resources for Women

Findings

- Lack of critical childcare support—limited ability to work
- Shift in childcare arrangements—adverse impact on local economy

Child Care Services Information

$54,000  $12/hour

Average cost of center-based care in Mecklenburg County for first five years.  
Wages earned by 25% of the poorest women in Mecklenburg County.
Child Care Services Recommendation

- Raise income limits for the childcare subsidy to include more families.
- Current rate for 0-5 is 200% of the poverty level.
- Current rate for 6-12 is 133% of the poverty level.
- Help more women move to financial stability.

Employment

Findings
- COVID-19 created additional childcare responsibilities
  - Often shared unequally
  - Mothers pushed to unemployment
- Heightened statistics of women in Mecklenburg County filing for unemployment support.

Recommendations
- Deploy intentional strategies to increase employability and pay for women
- Expand availability of unemployment insurance and paid sick leave for part-time workers
- Adjust income threshold eligibility requirements
  - Consider using last 60-90-day earnings as income threshold
Employment Information

Unemployment Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dec. 2019</th>
<th>Dec. 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Area</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecklenburg County</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

March 2020 Unemployment Claim Data by Gender

- Male: 39.2%
- Female: 60.8%
- Other: 0.2%

Source: U.S. BLS Local Area Unemployment Statistics

Communication Platforms/Systems

Findings
- A need for effective & inclusive County-wide communication systems.
  - Women without consistent internet
  - Information does not reach all women

Recommendations
- Employ traditional and non-traditional communication platforms
- Include common foreign languages
- Expand MeckHope.com to include communication in other languages

Figure adapted from Charlotte Work 2020 Unemployment Data
Community Support (Covid-19 Vaccine Distribution)

Findings
- Need to garner and engage community support for COVID-19 vaccine distribution
- Women and mothers lacking resources to allow time or opportunity to register and receive the Covid-19 vaccination.
  - Inflexible workplace
  - Lack of childcare services/resources
  - Inconsistent internet
  - Transportation difficulties

Recommendations
- Mobile vaccination services
- Increased communication in multiple languages
- Transportation vouchers
- Childcare resources

Summary of Recommendations

Mental Health Recommendations
- Communicate mental health services in the County
- Issue transportation vouchers
- Expand Behavioral Health Integration (BHI)
  - Especially within the Crescent

Childcare Services Recommendations
- Raise income limits for the childcare subsidy

Employment Recommendations
- Deploy intentional strategies to increase employability and pay women
- Expand availability of unemployment insurance and paid sick leave for part-time workers
- Adjust income threshold eligibility requirements

Communication Recommendations
- Employ traditional and non-traditional communication platforms
- Include common foreign languages
- Expand MeckHope.com to include communication in other languages

Community Support (COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution) Recommendations
- Mobile vaccination services
- Increased communication in multiple languages
- Transportation vouchers
- Childcare resources
Women’s Advisory Board of Mecklenburg County

Dr. Yolonda Holmes
Chair

Stacey Sandeford-Lyons
Vice-Chair

Kristin Buhlert
Secretary

Suzanne Elsberry Schweikert
Parliamentarian

Piper Yerger
Shawana Burnette
Jamilah Espinosa
Katie Ferraioli
Katelyn Hogan

Alexis Kondratyk
Marci Parrott
Kathy Pate
Corelutta Reid
Shekeria Smith-Barnes

Peter Safir & Elyse Hamilton-Childs, Community Support Staff
Comments

Chair Dunlap said the Board would look at the recommendations. He said some of the recommendations fell under the scope of the County but some of them were at the national level in which the County would not have an impact.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked, with regard to the to 350 to 1 mental health provider ratio, if they had a target figure that was better. She asked if they had a recommended number for raising the limits for child subsidy which included more families. *Dr. Homes said they did not any targets or numbers they would like to reach at that time.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if they brainstormed recommendations for the nontraditional platforms for communication. *Dr. Holmes said one of the recommendations was the utilization of the videos/commercial used while pumping gas. She said they were also connecting with the churches.*

Commissioner Meier thanked Vice Chair Sandeford-Lyons for her presentation. She asked what would the price tag would be for all the recommendations. *County Manager Diorio said this information was just being received now. It would all have to be costed out and decided what would be included and approved.*
Commissioner Jerrell asked how many people were included in the sample size collection data and how those people were reached. Dr. Holmes said the data was collected thru emails using a list of former community members who had been part of the Women’s Advisory Board prior to current board, used Eventbrite list gathering, put information out on the community services webpage through their staff contacts.

Commissioner Jerrell asked if they could focus on formerly incarcerated women. Dr. Holmes said they have done that prior to covid-19. She said in 2019 they went to the Central jail and spoke with the women about their needs who were nearing their release date.

Commissioner Powell thanked Dr. Holmes for their work.

Commissioner Cotham asked what the top one or two priorities of the recommendations were. Dr Holmes said Mental health and Wellness were the top 2 priorities.

Commissioner Cotham asked if women were also worried about their children’s mental health. Dr. Holmes said there had been conversations in that area also.

Commissioner Altman said she was in favor of raising the income limits for child care subsidies. She said she is very focused on mental health. She said agreed with the emphasis on workforce development.

Chair Dunlap did a quick review of the budget process.

Commissioner Leake joined the meeting at 3:07pm.

A copy of the presentation is on file with the Clerk to the Board.

**21-6747 AIR QUALITY COMMISSION BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS**

County Manager Diorio said the Mecklenburg County Air Quality Commission was comprised of 12 members appointed by the Board of County Commissioners with the mission of promoting the protection, preservation and enhancement of the ambient air resources in Mecklenburg County.

Peter McGrath, Chair of the Mecklenburg County Air Quality commission gave the presentation.
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Air Quality Commission
Budget Priority
Recommendations

Q & A / Discussion
PRESENTED TO THE MECKLENBURG
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
MARCH 29, 2021

Mecklenburg County Air Quality

1. MCAQ is funded by grants, permitting fees and gasoline tax and does not currently receive local property tax revenue.

2. The AQC’s comments regarding funding are intended to support departments which have fiscal responsibility for implementing the Environmental Leadership Policy.
Air Quality Commission Budget Priority Recommendations

1. Retaining education/outreach position previously funded through state allocated federal grant dollars.

The AQCC had initially considered asking for additional local funding to continue this position, but it now appears that federal grant dollars will continue to fund the costs of the position.

Air Quality Commission Budget Priority Recommendations

2. Funding for low emission (preferably electric) fleet vehicles and necessary infrastructure
Commissioner Meier asked if an outreach position was already being funded. *Mr. McGrath said yes this position was already funded in the Budget.*

Commissioner Jerrell and Commissioner Powell thanked Mr. McGrath and the Commission.

Commissioner Altman asked if he had an opinion on what the impact increased light rail would have on the long-term goals of Air quality. *Mr. McGrath said the air quality in Mecklenburg County was good and met all Federal Standards. He said the concern was when it came to ozone in Mecklenburg County due to the biggest contributor in ozone was transportation.*

Commissioners Powell, Rodriguez-McDowell and Leake thanked Mr. McGrath for his presentation.

*A copy of the presentation is on file with the Clerk to the Board.*
The Board received an update on the County's FY2022 budget public engagement initiative from Adrian Cox, Budget Director and Meagan Palmer, of MPC Consultant, Consultant who gave the presentation.

The following topics were covered:

FY22 Budget Public Engagement Update
Presented to the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners
March 23, 2021
Summary

Budget Prioritization Exercise
Group Report Outs

Community Budget Workshops Purpose

- Educating participants on the County’s budget & process
- Allowing residents to ask questions of County staff regarding budget & services
- Provide facilitated prioritization exercises help residents determine their priorities
- Assist County staff with understanding the needs and desires of the community through virtual interaction
Budget Workshop Agenda

- Welcome from the County Manager
- Meck Budget 101
- Budget Prioritization Exercise
- Meck Budget Simulator
- Budget Q & A

VIDEO

2021 BUDGET PROCESS

Watch on YouTube
Prioritization Exercise

- Breakout Rooms of 3-6 people
- Instructed to be their own “BOCC” and need to make tough decisions
- Come to consensus on top 5 Budget Priorities for the next year
- Report out

Overall Top Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th># of Times Included</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing Options</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing Programs &amp; Services</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Stewardship</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th># of Times Included</th>
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<tr>
<td>Workforce Development</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Security</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks &amp; Greenways</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care Disparities</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial Disparities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MECK Pre-K</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Workshop Priorities Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2020 Workshops</th>
<th>2021 Workshops</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Affordable Housing Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing</td>
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<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>Accessing Programs &amp; Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Environmental Stewardship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion Themes

- Arts and Culture linked to other priorities
- Transportation access linked to other priorities
- Affordable Housing options and how to decrease homelessness and the recently displaced residents
- Community seems to be unsure about County vs. City responsibilities (such as transportation, neighborhood development, etc.)

Attendance by Session
Demographic Conclusions

Distances:
- 1, 3 & 6 had less workshop survey respondents
- 2 & 3 had less budget survey respondents

Race/Ethnicity:
- African/Black Americans had more workshop survey respondents
- Caucasians had more budget survey respondents

Age:
- 45 and older had more workshop survey respondents
- 18-44 had more budget survey respondents

Workshop Exposure by Platform

- Nearly 70% of respondents indicated that they heard of the Community Workshops through other means such as word of mouth and group email distribution lists.
- This suggests that the County’s outreach efforts naturally work in conjunction with outside entities such as community groups and religious organizations.
Despite changing the workshop offering due to the pandemic, attendance has dramatically improved since the previous year by over 58%.

African/Black Americans had greater participation in these workshops than the Engagement Survey.

Results from this survey justifies our effort to focus on targeted marketing for future workshops.

Data shows that ongoing engagement is the key to maximizing attendance potential.

We will reevaluate weekend workshops against offering types (virtual/in-person) to determine future feasibility.
Chair Dunlap said while there was significant increased involvement in the budget process, it still represented a small segment of the total population. He said talking to one or two people was not representative of 1.1 million residents in the County.

Commissioner Jerrell asked what the number of people who participated in making recommendations was. Ms. Palmer said 299 people registered, but 125 actually attended, that being 42%. She said the response of the attendees allowed them to drill down in depth on what was important to include, that’s how recommendations were determined.

Commissioner Jerrell said the sample size seemed really small and asked Director Cox how they balanced that with such a small sample size in their approach in their recommendations to the Board. Director Cox said the with the surveys and workshops they got to have deeper engagements and hear the viewpoints and contexts of what their priorities were.

Commissioner Jerrell asked for clarification of slide 16 and that had no demographics conclusions for Districts 4 and 5. Meagan Palmer answered his questions.

Commissioner Jerrell asked of the Arts community was over represented and if so, how was that addressed. Meagan Palmer answered his questions.

Commissioner Powell asked how many residents took the survey. Director Cox said 4,303 took the online survey.

Commissioner Cotham said she liked the process of how the public was surveyed and how the information to make recommendations was gathered.

Commissioner Altman says she supported the undertaking.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if people that participated last year, did so this year as well. Director Cox said they kept up with the participants and followed up with the Budget recommendations afterwards.

Commissioner Leake thanked the Staff and County Manager for their work.

Chair Dunlap pointed out that each board member represented a minimum of 125,000 people. He said in this process, of the 454 who viewed the simulator, only 32 made submissions. He said he also noticed that the average time a person who submitted spent an average of 11 minutes doing so. He said it was a difficult process. He said to consider the fact that the County has a Manager who is charged with doing the heavy lifting.
Gibbie Harris, Public Health Director gave a verbal COVID-19 Response update.

Director Harris said the metrics were moving in the right direction but that there was a slight uptick that they were watching closely.

Director Harris said there was an average of 179 cases a day, which was up slightly. She said the positivity rate was approximately 5.1% and the case rate was 112.6 per 100,000 which was also up slightly.

Director Harris said hospitalizations were at 121 average per day which was down slightly and there were 17 outbreaks which was a significant improvement. She said she was cautiously optimistic based on these trends but had to remain vigilant and cautious. She said there were variants in our community and was concerned about the impact that those variants were going to have.

Director Harris said 16.5% of individuals in the community were partially vaccinated and 10.3% fully vaccinated. She said the percentage of African Americans and Hispanics had been slowly increasing over the last couple of weeks and they were continuing to work on that strategically with community partners. She said there had been a lot of discussion about the fact the County's numbers were lower than the State average in terms of percentage vaccinated and some concern about the number of people coming from outside of the County to be vaccinated. She said they had been getting the vaccine out into the community as soon as they received it. She said the State recognized there were a handful of communities who had not gotten the percentage of vaccine that others had gotten and Mecklenburg County was at the top of that list. She said they were now starting to see higher amounts of vaccine coming into the County and was hoping that would have the needed impact on the percentage of the population vaccinated.

Director Harris gave an update of where vaccines were available.

Director Harris said the Governor announced some relaxed restrictions because of the improved numbers in the state. She said the mask mandate and social distancing of six feet remained in place. She said for businesses, they had to maintain that six feet distance requirement which could be challenging for people with the increase in capacity.
Director Harris said the State had categorized different groups of businesses and others as low risk, medium risk and high risk.

Director Harris said those who had low-risk settings were allowed to go full capacity both indoor and out and those groups were retail shopping businesses, child care settings, camps, outdoor playgrounds, personal care businesses such as salons and barber shops as well as museums.

Director Harris said the medium-risk groups could have 100% capacity outdoor and up to 75% indoor as long as they were continuing to meet the six feet social distancing requirement. She said that group included restaurants, breweries, wineries, gyms, pools and amusement parks.

Director Harris said the high-risk groups could open up at 50% capacity which included stadiums and arenas, bars, conference spaces, reception spaces and movie theaters. She said the State also increased the mass gathering limits from 25 to 50 for indoors and 50 to 100 for outdoors. She said this particular executive order also fully lifted the restrictions on late-night sales and service of alcoholic beverages for all establishments. She said those changes went into effect Friday. She said the Governor was clear that this had to be done safely to be able to continue to keep things open and look for opportunities to open more in the community.

Director Harris said masking, social distancing, washing hands and avoiding large groups were critical as spring break approached. She said if we weren’t careful with these openings and with situations like spring break we could see additional cases in Mecklenburg County.

Comments

Chair Dunlap thanked Director Harris for thorough update.

Commissioner Powell asked when people could go back to the Government Center. County Manager Diorio said they were evaluating on month-to-month basis and for now they would not be back before June 1st. She said she they were looking at it from a number of different aspects and one was the availability of vaccine and how quickly people could get vaccinated. She said there were many employees who didn’t fall into the eligible groups yet and still needed to be vaccinated. She said they were also sensitive to the fact that many employees had school children and were trying to work through those challenges.

County Manager Diorio said she had to confirm that the City planned to keep the Government Center closed to the public until July.
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Commissioner Powell asked when the Board would be back for Board meetings. *County Manager Diorio said it would depend on the Board’s comfort level.*

Commissioner Powell said she thought hybrid meetings were a good option.

Chair Dunlap requested the Commissioners to send the County Manager a memo with their desire regarding holding meetings in the Government Center.

Commissioner Cotham thanked Director Harris for the information.

Commissioner Altman said being back in person should not be a matter of a Board vote but should be governed by science.

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if people were “jumping the line” and were going to other towns to get vaccinated. *Director Harris said the public was being asked to follow the criteria of the group being called for, but at the same time if vaccines were available they needed it to be getting them into arms. She said if there were vaccines available and a person could find it and others weren’t taking advantage of it she said get vaccinated.*

Commissioner Rodriguez-McDowell asked if vaccines were going to waste in some areas. *Director Harris said she didn’t know for sure if any was being wasted but if it was properly maintained in a freezer and not reconstituted in a vile it would be sustainable for a longer periods of time.*

Commissioner Meier asked if Director Harris had a possible date when the next round of vaccines would be available. *Director Harris said they continued to receive vaccines every week and they continued to schedule appointments in the clinic a week at a time as vaccines became available. She said planning was challenging. Any extra vaccines they had, they contacted people on the wait list.*

Director Harris said they asked for more Johnson & Johnson vaccines for specific events and groups like the jail and the homeless population and some homebound people.

Commissioner Meier asked if the Governor said anything about masks on playing fields for children. *Director Harris said the Governor did not say anything about that. She said she spoke with the Secretary and she said she thought it was still a smart thing to do.*

Commissioner Meier asked who made the decisions for the County pools. *Director Harris said Park & Recreation.*
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Commissioner Jerrell asked what the potential impact of the traces of variants in the community would be if a person was vaccinated. Director Harris was the majority of the variants seem to be affected at least to some extent by the vaccines that are available. She said they hadn’t seen a variant that was totally resistant to any of the vaccines. She said the concern was that the variants were much more contagious and more easily spread and one or two seemed to have an increased risk of serious illness. She said if a person was fully vaccinated they may become ill but not as ill as if they were not vaccinated and less likely to become infected.

Commissioner Leake thanked Director Harris for listening to her and assisting with the homebound seniors in the community.

Director Harris said she appreciated the help of the Commissioners in getting information out in right communities.

Commissioner Leake thanked Village HeartBEAT for its efforts.

Chair Dunlap asked County Manager Diorio to touch base with all the Commissioners to find out how many of them had been vaccinated and also with regard to returning to hybrid or fully in-person meetings and office readiness.

Chair Dunlap said he would be in touch with at least five of the Commissioners to conduct a lottery with regard to ranking for office spaces.

21-6726 UPDATE ON ENCAMPMENT HOTEL

Karen Pelletier, with Community Resources gave an update on the Encampment Hotel.
Comments

The Commissioners thanked Director Pelletier.

Commissioner Meier asked what was being done from a federal and state level. County Manager Diorio said they were still advocating for more dollars at the state and federal level. She said once they received treasury guidance with regard to ARPA dollars they would know how to align the County funding to help with housing. County Manager Diorio said a meeting...
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was scheduled with the City Manager and Superintendent to look at how they could align their funding to do something more impactful than working separately. She said between the City, the County and the School Board there was probably $700M that was coming.

Commissioner Altman asked if a resident was in need of services how and where would they call to get help. Director Pelletier said they would call 211 and the person would be put in contact with an outreach person. She said 211 is available 24/7 but to get to a coordinated entry assessor that would happen during business hours. She said they were trying to figure out what a greater, more impactful response could be.

Commissioner Altman asked if there was still the ability for an unsheltered individual to board CATS to get to a shelter and if there was still capacity in the shelters. Director Pelletier said any given day they received different numbers with regard to the capacity of the shelters but by calling 211 people would receive the best information to being able to get into a shelter.

Chair Dunlap asked if they were assisting the critically homeless in getting their stimulus checks. Director Pelletier said yes, the people in the hotel were being assisted.

21-6774 COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioners shared information of their choosing within the guidelines as established by the board which included but not limited to, past and/or upcoming events.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, Chair Dunlap declared the meeting adjourned at 5:02 pm.

Kristine M. Smith, Interim Clerk to the Board

George Dunlap, Chair