

# **Meherrin River Regional Jail Authority Board Meeting Minutes**

**Monday, March 22, 2021**

The Meherrin River Regional Jail Authority Board held their meeting virtually over Cisco Webex.

## **I. Call To Order**

Members Present are as follows:

Brian Roberts, Brunswick County Sheriff  
Dr. Charlette Woolridge, Brunswick County Administrator  
Bernard Jones, Brunswick County Board of Supervisors  
Duck Adams, Dinwiddie County Sheriff  
Bill Chavis, Dinwiddie County Board of Supervisors  
Kevin Massengill, Dinwiddie County Administrator  
Bobby Hawkins, Mecklenburg County Sheriff  
Wayne Carter, Mecklenburg County Administrator  
Tom Tanner, Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors (via telephone)

Others in attendance are as follows:

Crystal Willett, Superintendent  
Major Brent Wright, Deputy Superintendent  
Brendan Hefty, Hefty, Wiley & Gore, P.C.  
Major Andy Ezell, Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office  
Jennifer Derrenbacker, Finance Director  
Shelley Slaughter, Executive Secretary  
Greg Nicholson, Securus Technologies  
Matt Anderson, Securus Technologies

## **II. Approval of Agenda**

Kevin Massengill made a motion to approve the March 22, 2021 agenda. Wayne Carter seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

## **III. Approval of Minutes**

Wayne Carter made a motion to approve the November 5, 2020 and the January 14, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes. Sheriff Duck Adams seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

#### **IV. New Business**

##### **A. Superintendent's Report**

1. Inmate Telephone Services RFP – The Jail received four responses to the RFP for Inmate Telephone Services; Combined Public Communications, LLC, Global Tel\*Link Corporation, Inmate Calling Solutions, LLC, and Securus Technologies, LLC. After interviews and negotiations, the committee, which consisted of Superintendent Crystal Willett, Major Brent Wright, Jennifer Derrenbacker and Guy Short, voted to award the contract to Global Tel\*Link Corporation. The new contract will increase our current MAG of \$270,000 to a \$412,500 MAG, which increases our revenue \$142,500. In addition, there will not be any increase in cost for family and friends as the call rate did not increase and stayed the same at \$0.28 per minute.

Dr. Charlette Woolridge made a motion to approve the committee's recommendation to award the Inmate Telephone Services RFP to Global Tel\*Link Corporation. Kevin Massengill seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

2. Monthly Status Report – The Monthly Status Report for the months of December 2020 through February 2021 was presented.

The Jail currently has one locality work force crew going out as of March and is able to quarantine them in 1 unit. This crew is being picked up by the locality, not taken out by the Jail. The Meherrin work force crew is not running at this time. The challenge with work force is, at this time staffing and the 14-day quarantine period upon their return to the facility. Once we can work within the quarantine period and the Jail has more staffing stability, we can then address getting the Meherrin work force crew back up and running. The Jail understands how important the work force crews are to the localities and this will be one of the first functions that will be resumed when possible. If your locality needs a work force crew, you can call the Jail and arrange this, but the locality must pick the work force crew up and supervise them with their staff.

COVID Update – During the outbreak of COVID-19 in the facility, 428 offenders were tested. Of those tested, 158 tested positive, 253 tested negative, 9 were inconclusive and 39 refused. During this time, 19 Officers tested positive as well. The Jail employees have now received their vaccines as of this past Friday. There has not been any information available as of today on vaccines for the offenders.

A Jail employee filed a complaint with The Department of Labor and Industry. The Jail had to provide a lot of documentation to include operational protocols, personnel protocols and answer many questions. After reviewing the information provided to them, they do not feel they need to visit the facility and have closed the investigation. The complainant also received all of this information and has a certain amount of time to file an appeal.

3. Debt Service Reserve Fund – The Jail invested \$2.5 million in a 10-year Treasury Bond as a result of the 2011 refinancing. When this money was invested, the Jail earned 3.47% and

had great success in the investment of these funds. This matured as of February 15, 2021 and the Meherrin River Regional Jail Authority needs to direct the trustee, US Bank, on how to proceed with these funds. We have the option to invest the \$2.5 million or just a portion of this total amount into a Money Market Account or SNAP. Different rates were discussed as of March 18, 2021. The recommendations from Davenport are 1) leave the \$2.5 million in the SNAP account and wait to see if the interest rates increase, or 2) invest a portion of the funds in a Treasury Bond with a ladder portfolio and revisit interest rates in 6 months to 1 year.

Wayne Carter made a motion to re-invest \$1 million for 2 years and leave the remaining \$1.5 million in the SNAP Account and revisit in 6 months to 1 year to review the interest rates at the time. Kevin Massengill seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

4. Quarterly Financial Report Q2 2021 – The Quarterly Report as of December 31, 2020 was presented. The Jail has collected 52.27% of its budgeted revenues and spent 44.77% of its budgeted expenses. Revenues are slightly higher than expenses due to additional revenue sources. At the end of the second quarter the ADP was 373 with Brunswick accounting for 30.5%, Dinwiddie 19.5% and Mecklenburg 50%. Based on these numbers, the True-Up as of December 31, 2020 shows that Mecklenburg would owe \$330,893, Dinwiddie would receive a refund of \$180,023 and Brunswick would receive a refund of \$150,870.
5. Retention and Recruitment – The Finance Committee met prior to today's Board Meeting to discuss retention, recruitment and initiatives. Some initiatives have already been put into place by Superintendent Crystal Willett. The Personnel Committee also met and discussed some other initiatives that needed approval. After reviewing and discussing these initiatives, the Personnel Committee authorized Superintendent Willett to put them into place as well. More initiatives will be discussed today and will require approval by the Board. There are some personnel items that cannot be discussed in open session, so the County Administrators will discuss this information in further detail with their fellow Board Members.

The FY22 budget will not be adopted today, but will be discussed due to some of these initiatives needing to go into effect tomorrow if approved by the Board. The Personnel Committee is recommending these initiatives based on the staffing issues at the Jail that are due to the profession/retention/recruitment all combined with the issues that have arisen with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Superintendent Willett created and presented a presentation to go over the issues at hand and the initiatives that are being recommended today.

Over the past 2 months, 17 employees have resigned. Of these 17, 11 stated COVID as the reason for resigning (the stress, the risk). The Jail has hired 10 new employees and has 1 pending as of today.

Over the past 3 years the average vacancy rate is 41 positions, but this is based off of 20/19 officers per shift IF fully loaded (672 offenders). On average the Jail hires 37 new officers

per year and on average there are 43 resignations per year. This deficit in regards to new hires vs. resignations is what needs to be focused on.

Due to these issues, Superintendent Willett, along with the Personnel Committee, is recommending applying a 5% increase and Compensation Board C7/C8 increase of \$897/\$938, increase the starting salary for an officer to \$40,000, create an Officer Development Plan, and apply compression to our current officers as well as all other positions.

The Officer Development Plan would specifically be aimed at new hires as follows:

- Recruit – Hire with Salary of \$40,000
- Officer – After first year, receive a 4.65% increase which is offset by the 4.65% increase given by the Compensation Board for all C7's when they complete their first year.
- OIC/FTO – Revise post orders to include more responsibility with mentoring/training/support. Receive a 5% increase if the officer passes the interview/testing

As of today, an officer's starting salary at Meherrin River Regional Jail is \$33,881. In researching other agencies it was discovered that some of the other regional jails that we are losing officers to are allowed to negotiate up to 10% over their starting salary and are hiring new officers in the \$38,000 range. We feel that increasing the starting salary to \$40,000 will help recruit and retain new officers. The projected increase in FY22 is \$110,444.74 due to the Jail's expenses being lowered by 18 officers. Based on the current Average Daily Population, the Jail needs 10/12 officers per shift. By allocating for 15 per shift, this allows for specialty positions and future growth, as well as the ability to fund these changes that are being requested today.

Wayne Carter made a motion to approve the 5% increase and Compensation Board C7/C8 increase of \$897/\$938, increase the starting salary for an officer to \$40,000, create an Officer Development Plan, and apply compression to our current officers as well as all other positions, effective March 23, 2021. Sheriff Duck Adams has no issues with the recommended initiatives thus far, but believes that the issues at the Jail are not 100% money related and feels that we should have an independent person come into the Jail to survey and ask questions to try to figure out the issues and give recommendations to help with employee morale before too many changes are made. Sheriff Brian Roberts informed him that the presentation by Superintendent Willett was not yet complete, and other initiatives were going to be recommended today that may answer any questions or concerns he may have. Sheriff Roberts suggested that the motion on the table be voted on, the presentation continue and if at that time Sheriff Adams' concerns are not met, he could then ask additional questions or make a motion to request further research. Sheriff Duck Adams agreed that the presentation could continue, but that he still felt someone should come in to the Jail to try to figure out what issues are present and how to address them. Kevin Massengill seconded Wayne Carter's motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

FREE MEALS - The Jail has a Staff Advisory Committee that meets often to discuss issues and/or recommendations from staff. There is also a Suggestion Box where employees can submit suggestions and/or recommendations. It is often asked if employees can receive meals for free. The staff meals are currently \$1.50 for a breakfast sandwich and \$3.50 for the buffet and most items on the made-to-order menu are \$3.50. The Jail implemented a program called Just Like Home in FY19. This program allows family/friends to purchase meals for the offenders. In FY19 this program created \$138,000 in revenue, in FY20 it created \$167,000 in revenue, and the projection for the current year is \$268,000 in revenue. The Jail feels that this revenue, combined with the revenue received from the US Marshal offenders, would allow the Jail to offer 2 free meals per employee, per shift. There would need to be stipulations with this program. For instance, closing the buffet and only offering made to order meals. The buffet has been closed during the COVID pandemic and the Jail recommends not re-opening it. This would help control inventory and cut down on portion sizes and waste. The Jail is recommending providing 2 free meals (1 breakfast, 1 lunch/dinner) per employee, per shift and cover the expenses with revenue received from Just Like Home and the US Marshal revenue. Dr. Charlette Woolridge made a motion to approve the Jail to offer 2 free meals per employee, per shift and cover the expenses with revenue from Just Like Home and US Marshal holds. Wayne Carter seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

INITIATIVES NEEDING BOARD ACKNOWLEDGEMENT - The Jail has decided to advertise certain positions externally, such as the Jail Officer position. However, for these positions, such as Sergeant, Lieutenant, Captain, etc., these positions will be advertised internally first and once all options have been exhausted and the position has not been filled, it will then be advertised externally. The Jail has also researched other facilities and has found that many have hired civilian employees for certain specialty positions, such as Safety and Standards and Programs. This is being looked into as an option, as opposed to hiring a Jail Officer for these positions, to help keep the shift complement strong.

MECKLENBURG FACILITY – Sheriff Brian Roberts, Chairman, requested that the Jail staff study and analyze the Mecklenburg Facility. The Mecklenburg locality allowed Superintendent Willett to temporarily close the Mecklenburg Facility around January 5<sup>th</sup> due to staffing challenges. The goal has been to reopen as soon as possible. It was discussed to reopen on March 15<sup>th</sup>; however, staffing continued to become more dire. The Personnel Committee was approached and discussions were had regarding these issues and the Mecklenburg representatives were asked about delaying the opening. There is not a definitive reopen date at this time. The Jail needs to hire Jail Officers before the Mecklenburg Facility can reopen.

The biggest issue with the Mecklenburg Facility has been offender-to-staff ratio and cost. The facility was never opened to be run at full capacity or to house offenders with medical issues, mental issues, etc. The reasoning the offender numbers were low at the Mecklenburg Facility was due to not having medical/mental health coverage at this site. If the Mecklenburg Facility were to open today, there would be approximately 10 offenders that could be housed there at this time. It is being recommended today that the Mecklenburg Facility needs to be staffed appropriately from a medical perspective so that more offenders can be housed there and the facility can be run more equally to the Alberta

Facility. There is a lot of disparity and challenges between the 2 facilities. Some employees of the Mecklenburg Facility feel that they have lost their skill set and are afraid to work at the Alberta Facility. As the mental health system continues to fail all of us, it has compounded us in the Jail setting. The Alberta Facility has become very toxic in many ways such as employee morale, staffing and offenders. We are trying to figure out a way to help and fix these issues.

One of the initiatives that the Personnel Committee as well as the Jail feels can help is to reopen the Mecklenburg Site, but make investments to bring it up to par with the Alberta Site and staff accordingly.

Superintendent Willett reached out to Mediko in regards to adding medical coverage to the Mecklenburg Facility. The cost to add 24/7 RN coverage would be \$618,000. The cost to add 24/7 LPN coverage would be \$439,751. Superintendent Willett recommends adding 24/7 LPN coverage and in addition have an RN from the Alberta Facility visit the Mecklenburg Facility from time to time and the Tele-Med carts can be utilized as well.

Previously, with 16 offenders housed at the Mecklenburg Facility, it cost \$155,539.93 per year or \$426.14 per day, per offender. If we add 24/7 LPN coverage and house 50 offenders at the Mecklenburg Facility, it would cost \$75,329.60 per year or \$206.38 per day, per offender. By providing medical and mental health coverage to the Mecklenburg Facility, we would be able to house more offenders and bring the cost per offender, per day down. The Jail recommends funding this additional coverage by using the Rate Stabilization Fund. The fund is used to offset large budget increases over a budget year in order to help operational per diem. Currently the Rate Stabilization Fund is at \$107,074. The Jail is recommending at the end of the year after all of the auditing entries are made, to take 20% of what would typically flow to the Fund Balance and apply it to the Rate Stabilization Fund. Our projection to date is \$2.8 million in surplus. Twenty percent of that total is \$560,000 and along with the beginning \$107,074 balance, implementing this policy will provide funding for the 24/7 LPN coverage starting July 1, 2021.

Wayne Carter made a motion to notify Mediko now so they can work on getting 24/7 LPN coverage for the Mecklenburg Facility to be effective as of July 1, 2021 and use the Rate Stabilization Fund and 20% from the \$2.8 million surplus to cover the costs in FY22 and continue to use 20% from surplus to cover future costs. This will not affect the Mecklenburg Facility opening prior to July 1, 2021 if security staffing increases. Sheriff Bobby Hawkins seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.

**REALLOCATION OF POSITIONS/DUTIES:** The Jail has reallocated a few positions and duties to help with retention. Major Brent Wright oversees a lot of areas to include certain areas of Administration, Support, Operations, Security and the Mecklenburg Facility. To minimize the number of people that this position would have direct connection with and in hopes that there would be more availability between the 2 positions to work one-on-one with their specific divisions, the Jail has created an additional Major position. Major Brent Wright would continue to oversee certain areas of Administration and Support, and the new Major position would oversee Operations and Security to include the Mecklenburg Facility. This would help with a more direct connection with command staff and allow for

communication, attending meetings and helping with duties. The position is currently being advertised internally and closes at the end of this week. The Personnel Committee has endorsed this position and if no one internally meets the requirements, the position will be advertised externally.

6. Proposed FY22 Budget – Jennifer Derrenbacker reviewed the FY22 Proposed Budget with the Board. The reductions/increases from the FY21 Adopted Budget for the localities is as follows: Brunswick’s portion is reducing by \$263,145, Dinwiddie’s portion is reducing by \$394,525 and Mecklenburg’s portion is increasing by \$109,936. Revenues are increasing due to the Inmate Telephone Contract that was just approved and the \$396,625 that will be funded by the Compensation Board for the 5% increase and the increase in the C7 and C8 positions. The Jail is able to fund the majority of this by not expensing the additional 18 C7 new hire positions at \$40,000 each, which is a \$720,000 reduction. Due to this, the Jail’s FY22 wages and benefits budget will only increase by \$110,445 from FY21.

The new proposed per diem is \$56.48 and includes operational per diem and debt service per diem.

Wayne Carter inquired about how many US Marshal holds the Jail has. The Jail currently holds approximately 20. This number is low due to space and having the 14-day quarantine period. Major Brent Wright works closely with the US Marshals and informs them when space is available. The Jail earns approximately \$12 per offender, per day with this program.

**V. Good of the Order**

Sheriff Duck Adams has concerns with hiring another Major position without first looking into the option of hiring an independent person to survey the Jail first and get ideas on what the issues are and how to fix them. He does not believe hiring another Major, or promoting within the Jail, will fix the issues at hand. Two County Administrators reached out to Sheriff Brian Roberts with concerns and he then reached out to Superintendent Crystal Willett to come up with a recommendation to help with these concerns. It was decided that hiring an additional Major would be helpful to address some of these concerns. Kevin Massengill will meet with Sheriff Duck Adams and William Chavis to go into further detail in regards to the discussion between the Finance Committee and the Jail earlier today. He feels that there are substantial operational issues and one change is not going to fix it all. However, he feels that the recommendations that have been discussed and approved today are a good start and he feels that there is no time to wait. He will meet with Sheriff Adams and William Chavis to discuss in further detail.

**VI. Next Meeting**

The next Board meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, May 6, 2021, at 12:30 p.m. It is to be determined if the meeting will be held at the Meherrin River Regional Jail or virtually over Cisco Webex.

**VII. Adjourn**

There being no further business, a motion was made by Wayne Carter to adjourn the meeting. Kevin Massengill seconded the motion. All members present voted in favor of the motion.