

TERM OF COMMISSION: October Session of the August Adjourned Term

PLACE OF MEETING: Boone County Government Center Room 220

PRESENT WERE: Presiding Commissioner Don Stamper
District I Commissioner Karen M. Miller
District II Commissioner Linda Vogt
Deputy County Clerk Michelle Malaby
Auditor and Chief Budget Officer June Pitchford

The regular meeting of the County Commission was called to order at 1:04 p.m.

SUBJECT: Public Hearing on 1997 Budget

Ms. Pitchford stated this hearing is a new procedure for the county. She and the commission feel it is important to take steps to promote public involvement in the budget process, particularly on the front end. The purpose is not to discuss specific requests, but to invite comment from citizens which can be considered in developing the budget. She is reviewing requests received and will deliver a proposed budget to the commission in mid November. The commission will then commence its work. Additional public hearings will be held, with adoption of the final budget planned for late December.

Pam Jordan, 1603 Scott Boulevard, stated she is not sure she is attending the right meeting because her concerns relate to the Family Health Center.

Ms. Pitchford stated although she does not want to spend a lot of time hearing specific requests, this is an appropriate forum to hear about the county's role in health care.

Commissioner Stamper agreed, noting Ms. Jordan is a Family Health Center board member. The commission is trying to determine what its role in public health should be. The role the Family Health Center might play can be discussed. Specific requests can be discussed later.

Ms. Jordan stated not only is she a Family Health Center board member, she has been a client of the Family Health Center since she and her daughter moved to the area in 1992. In terms of health care, she is one of the many people who are falling through the cracks. The type of people who are in need of health care are not those who drive Cadillacs but want free medical service. They are people who work or go to school. When she came to the area, she attended school and worked three part time jobs. She could not make ends meet. She could not get health insurance from her part time employers. She does not know where she would be if that type of health care facility (like the Family Health Center) were not available. It is extremely important that that type of health care be supplied to the community. She does not consider herself as one who sits back and waits for things to happen. Since she has been in this area, she has not been in the position to avail herself of health care she would pay for. Although she does not specifically pay for health care service, she is a taxpayer. It is hard to not be able to pay for your services. She feels good to work and pay taxes to contribute to such benefits. She would like the commission to consider providing the type of health care provided by facilities such as Family Health Center. There are so many people who fall through the cracks.

Commissioner Miller stated she has spoken to Ms. Jordan at length on this subject. It has been helpful. She believes Ms. Jordan is giving back to the Family Health Center by sitting on the board and working at that level.

Commissioner Stamper stated evaluating the amount of investment in public health has been an interesting debate for the commission. The commission must consider how to balance its investment in public health with statutory obligations. The county is given certain responsibilities by law. Other responsibilities are assumed. Statutory responsibilities come first. The statutory responsibility regarding public health is vague. Commissioner Miller spent a great deal of time trying to define it. It is not as clear as the County Clerk's mandate to conduct elections. Boone County is fortunate to have additional funding to use for assumed responsibilities. Commissioner Stamper stated he has always been a fan of the Family Health Center. This community is

perceived to be one area in the country with the greatest access to health care. That may not seem to be the case to individuals in circumstances such as those Ms. Jordan describes.

Commissioner Vogt stated even though the commission struggles with the issue of what the county's obligations are, she believes Boone County citizens expect government assistance with, and provision of, good public health. In group meetings organized by the Health Report Card one discussion is where should support come from. They discussed whether the Chamber of Commerce should examine what could be required of employers or what they could do to improve the situation. Commissioner Vogt asked Ms. Jordan whether she believes the job market could provide solutions? Should all funding come from the government or from health care providers?

Ms. Jordan stated a lot of businesses deliberately create situations such as shared positions in order to avoid paying for benefits. She does not know that the commission could require an employer to supply health insurance.

Commissioner Vogt replied she does not believe the commission could. That is not what she meant to imply. The community itself could work toward that goal.

Ms. Jordan stated with all the medical resources this community has, it is a shame that such a large number of people are falling through the cracks. Maybe businesses are not aware of the situation. Maybe publicity and education are needed to inform people of the problem. There is a misconception that people who want services live extravagantly or just do not want to work. She believes the percentage of those in need who fit that description is extremely small in this community.

Commissioner Miller stated she is on the Chamber of Commerce's Health Report Card subcommittee on benefits. The subcommittee has representatives from hospitals, large employers and the University of Missouri. They talk about the number of people who chose not to accept insurance offered to them because they do not want to pay their share of the cost. The subcommittee looked at whether employers could require employees to accept the benefit if they did not have proof of other insurance. That is illegal.

Ms. Pitchford stated Ms. Jordan is obviously here because she believes the county has a role in public health. Part of the question which needs to be answered is what is public health? What falls under the umbrella of public health? Ms. Pitchford asked Ms. Jordan for her opinion.

Ms. Jordan replied she would have to say public health is the provision of services that she has been able to avail herself, services such as those provided by the Boone County/City of Columbia Health Department. Preventative medicine is necessary. Pediatric check-ups are necessary. The government should provide funding to support institutions which can supply health care to families in need. Her daughter has experienced repeated ear infections which need attention. Ms. Jordan stated she recently had to have a procedure performed. She does not know what she would have done if the services had not been available. She guesses she would have lost her leg. The government should provide the services an individual who has insurance could receive. People who are uninsured or underinsured need to be able to have peace of mind. They have the right to health care via facilities such as the Family Health Center.

Commissioner Stamper stated he recently read a definition that implied the responsibility of local government was to work cooperatively with local and state agencies to provide public health care to prevent further illness or injury to the population which does not have access to health care. That definition is not as broad as the one Health Department Director Mike Sanford would give. If a person loses a leg, they become less productive. If they have a significant, ongoing illness, they are less productive. The problem, from this side of the table, is the cost can be three times the size of the county's budget. The county could literally invest ten to twenty million dollars a year on public health care. The questions are what is the return on the dollar and the benefit provided?

Ms. Jordan replied she does not believe the county has total responsibility for health care. She knows funding is also provided by area hospitals. Grant funding is available. A portion of funding should come from the county. She would think the county would want to have a role in that.

Commissioner Vogt stated when different sources of funding are discussed, she tries to look at how much support can be expected to come from the public. How much support can be expected from government, whether it is federal, state or local?

Commissioner Stamper called for additional public comment on the 1997 budget.

Darrell Foster, 1305 White Oak Lane, Columbia, stated earlier this year he submitted an agenda for African American employment. It was typed up as an **increase**, and he will accept the jargon, in African American employment. They have no representation in middle to upper level management. Since this was accepted as public record by the commission, has the commission included anything in its budget to increase African American employment in the middle and upper management levels of county government? If not, why not?

Commissioner Stamper stated the budget has not been drafted. The county has increased African American representation in middle management at the Public Works Department with the hiring of an engineer about a month ago. The commission continues to work through the Human Resources Department on a daily/weekly/monthly basis to recruit applicants representing all minorities. Has a specific proposal been made to add, specifically African American, positions to the 1997 budget? He is not aware of any proposal being forwarded to the Auditor.

Mr. Foster replied he submitted the proposal to the commission earlier this year. Mr. Foster asked Commissioner Stamper if hiring one African American is significant, based on the population of African Americans in this area? Most of the African Americans in this community are democrats who send people into these offices.

Commissioner Stamper stated he considers hiring one African American to be very significant and a step in the right direction. You cannot simply throw numbers around. You have to look at the frequency of employee turnover. The county went an extra mile to hire an African American for the engineer position by waiving a requirement. It delayed the requirement that he have a professional engineer license for several months. Commissioner Stamper stated he thinks the county continues to make progress in this area. The county is not in a position of inventing positions just so it can change the numbers. As positions open, the commission is encouraging consideration of minority employment everywhere it can. In this very room, not two weeks ago, elected officials and department heads met with one of the co-chairs of the Race Relations Task Force to hear his description of needs, and talked about how we as a county can more actively--

Mr. Foster asked who Commissioner Stamper is talking about?

Commissioner Stamper replied Gary Oxenhandler, co-chair of the Race Relations Task Force. Commissioner Stamper stated the county is taking steps wherever possible to raise awareness and to encourage full integration in county government. The county is not proposing the creation of positions just so there will be minority representation.

Mr. Foster stated Commissioner Stamper is saying the county has not, outside of hiring one individual, taken steps to include African Americans in the budget and in the process, in terms of having employment with the County of Boone.

Commissioner Stamper replied that is not what he said, those are Mr. Foster's words. Commissioner Stamper recognized Commissioner Vogt for a comment.

Commissioner Vogt stated the county has taken steps by creating the Human Resources Department and, through the Human Resources, creating an affirmative action plan for the county. She believes that is what the county should be doing. The commission cannot talk about specific cases, because she believes what Mr. Foster is asking for is an overall plan. She really thinks the county is in the process of having that plan. We are working toward a goal of having county employment reflect the population in this area.

Mr. Foster asked is Commissioner Vogt saying there is an affirmative action plan, or some type of a layout, in this budget --

Commissioner Vogt interjected it is in the current budget. They are working on it right now.

Mr. Foster questioned is the county going to implement it soon?

Commissioner Vogt replied the county is in the process of implementation.

Mr. Foster stated he heard the lady mention health. Health is always very important in our community. It is a well-being and psychological attitude. The lack of it can get into mental health. In terms of health we have been driven, we being the African American community, by a lack of involvement, a lack of input, even a lack of appointments (to boards and commissions) by the county. The arrogance they see from some County Commissioners, not all but a few, stresses them and puts them in a psychological position which does not include a well being. Mr. Foster stated he does not think it is an accident. Mr. Foster stated he is sure it is some type of design. What does he like about the budget the county is putting together? Nothing. N-O-T-H-I-N-G. He does not like anything about it. It should be more inclusive of the people who actually make things work--the public. The public includes African Americans as well as others. They have been excluded. He wants the commission to know they have to get away from this. It has to include them in the decisions it is making that will shape and develop their lives.

Commissioner Stamper stated the purpose of this session was to provide that type of inclusion. The floor is yours for substantive suggestions on how the county might improve.

Ms. Pitchford clarified this is the first year the county has invited public comment prior to the development of its budget. The county has not taken up a specific budget for consideration. The county is at the point of inviting public comment to help shape priorities in the 1997 budget.

Mr. Foster stated that is why he is here. He did receive an invitation. The Frederick Douglass Coalition asked him to come. He was elated to hear that. He wants to move in the right direction. He is interested in building bridges and working things out. However, at the same time, it seems that the commission has to be reminded that they are in the community. It is election time. The commission has to be reminded that they need jobs and incentives to be involved in county government. Furthermore, when the county contracts with companies, how about requiring fifteen percent of their employees be African American? He did not say minorities. He said African Americans. Black people. People that need jobs, people that need health care benefits and things of that nature. These guys, the cronies, are giving away these contracts, and we are left standing. It is wrong. Can something like that be included to make it right?

Commissioner Stamper stated Mr. Foster's suggestion has been noted.

Commissioner Vogt stated she personally does not know whether that would be legal in that the county has the statutory obligation to accept the lowest and best bid to provide a service or item to the people of the county. She does not know if county government has that authority.

Mr. Foster replied the commission has the authority from the standpoint that it sets policy and makes decisions. In fairness, everyone that puts in ingredients to make the pie, should get a piece when it comes time to slice the pie. African Americans represent ten to twelve percent of taxpayers in Boone County. That percentage is not reflected in jobs and contracts. How many African American contracts are there? Probably zero. The people the county is issuing contracts to should be held accountable. They should be required to hire African American people because they add to the tax base. African Americans are being eliminated. It is not right. It is a requirement that the commission can come up with. It has the power.

Commissioner Stamper asked Mr. Foster if he is aware of any public organization in the State of Missouri that requires an employment threshold of African Americans for their contracts?

Mr. Foster replied check with the State. They have requirements, when they contract to build highways, that companies have a certain number of minorities involved. The commission has been issuing contracts with no lines on it that say they have to hire even one. Those guys are not going to hire him. They are not going to hire his brother or anybody that looks like him unless they are required to do it. The commission can implement that policy. All you have to do is sit down, make the motion--

Commissioner Stamper stated it is not quite that simple.

Mr. Foster replied it is that simple.

Commissioner Stamper stated if it is that simple then it will get a good evaluation. But, he wants Mr. Foster to know it will be more complex than that. The commission will have to check that it has the legal authority to be able to do that. The fact that he is not aware of any other public entity that requires a threshold of minority employment by any contractor raises a concern he wants to know more about. Commissioner Stamper stated he thinks the county is making some steps. Since Mr. Foster visited with the commission last, the commission has appointed an African American to the Planning and Zoning Commission, hired an engineer at the road and bridge department, and has continued to work-- Commissioner Stamper stated there is no point in talking any further if Mr. Foster is not going to hear it.

Mr. Foster replied he was doing his whoop-te-do.

Commissioner Stamper replied fine. Commissioner Stamper stated we, as a county government, are very concerned.

Mr. Foster stated two people out of 160 to 200 positions--

Commissioner Stamper interjected there are 300 employees in county government.

Mr. Foster replied that amounts to less than .0 something percent.

Commissioner Stamper asked Mr. Foster if he has additional testimony.

Mr. Foster replied, yes he has further testimony. He wants to go back to contracts. The commission does have the power. Someone makes a motion. Someone seconds it. It can go on record that we have that much experience in parliamentary procedure to know what takes place. They also sit on the board of Planned Parenthood and we see these things take place. So we know that you can do that. It is just a matter of someone making a motion and someone seconding it and putting it into effect. That is all it required. No under the table. No smoke filled rooms.

Commissioner Stamper replied he said they will see about that. The commission will evaluate that.

Mr. Foster stated he heard the lady speak about falling through cracks. There are a number of community people, regardless of what color they are, who are falling through the cracks based on the lack of health care. As commissioners you need to address that. You are our leaders. We look to you to make decisions that will be in the best interests of all. That is why he is here, in the best interests of all. However, when he looks in the mirror, he finds himself very black, very proud, and very happy. He has to address the concerns that first come from home and then work his way out. Health care is very important. We need that well-being. We need that psychological health, that structure, and the commission can provide that too. It is a matter of you sitting down, making some decisions, bringing in some grass roots people, not just cronies, who are interested in what goes on, regardless of their color, regardless of what position they take with you or you take with them. We have to be more open minded and realistic about Boone County and Columbia if we are going to move forward. The commission is taking some steps, but don't tell him he is supposed to be impressed with two people out of three hundred. He is not impressed. As a matter fact, he is a little upset. Make sense?

Commissioner Stamper asked, anything else?

Mr. Foster stated he is listening right now. As it goes, he may jump back in. Mr. Foster questioned, he has that option, doesn't he?

Commissioner Stamper replied until he concludes the public hearing.

Commissioner Stamper asked three times whether there is additional public comment concerning the 1997 budget.

There was no response.

Ms. Pitchford reminded those present the next public hearing will be held on Tuesday at 5:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 1:39 p.m.

Attest:

Don Stamper
Presiding Commissioner

Wendy S. Noren
Clerk of the County Commission

Karen M. Miller
District I Commissioner

Linda Vogt
District II Commissioner