

Should commissioners control DSS and Health Department?

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Who should be in charge of the Departments of Social Services and Public Health?

That's a topic Forsyth County commissioners will be discussing in next year's winter work session.

Currently both departments are governed by appointed boards of citizens, who hire those department's directors and oversee their duties. In 2012, the N.C. General Assembly passed a law that allows consolidating how those departments are run. This includes the option of eliminating those boards and placing both departments under direct county control.

Staff presented commissioners with several options for consolidation during a Thursday, Sept. 22 briefing. One was keeping the departments as they are, but

eliminating both boards and placing the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners as their governing body. Another option was having a consolidated human services director over both departments who is appointed by the county manager with the advice and consent of a new consolidated board for both departments. A final option has the county manager hiring a consolidated human services director with the advice and consent of county commissioners, who would act as the board for human services.

County Manager Dudley Watts asked commissioners to include a study on consolidation options as part of staff directives in this year's budget, which will let them discuss if the new options might be right for the county.

While some counties like Guilford and Mecklenburg have consolidated their human services, the vast majority of North

Carolina counties have not and still have their two separate governing boards.

County Commissioner Walter Marshall, who is on the Department of Social Services board, said he didn't support consolidation.

"We have to keep in mind that the original purpose of the board was to make sure that certain things remain non-political as possible," he said.

Marshall also didn't think part-time elected officials would have time to deal with all the extra concerns that both those boards currently deal with.

"We have boards to do the work that we don't have time to do," he said.

Commissioner Everette Witherspoon agreed the boards help keep politics out of the departments. He said they also let the public have input into how human services should be run.

"I like it the way it is, and I don't think

we should change it," said Witherspoon.

Commissioner Gloria Whisenhunt, who is on the Board of Health, was more open to the idea. She said, unlike the county commissioners meetings, she's never seen a reporter cover the health board's meetings, so there's little public awareness of what happens in them. She said that while she wasn't sold on any of the options, she felt the commissioners should be the ones hiring the directors of those departments. She didn't believe there was enough accountability for them under the boards.

"I think it's something that we desperately need to discuss and find out if what we're doing is the best thing," she said.

The commissioners will be discussing the options further in their winter work session in February.

County approves Corning incentives

BY TODD LUCK
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Forsyth County commissioners approved an incentive deal for Corning Optical Communications LLC to expand in Winston-Salem at its Monday, Sept. 26, meeting.

Corning has agreed to expand its local fiber optic cable manufacturing operation, which currently has 304 employees. The company plans to add 100 new full-time jobs locally with an average wage of \$58,000 a year plus benefits within four years, and invest \$30 million in additional machinery and equipment within five years. Forsyth County agreed to an incentive of up to \$384,872 from the general fund over a five year period. The incentive will not exceed half of the property tax paid by Corning in the prior fiscal year.

"I think it's a good deal for us, I think it's a good deal for the company," said County Commissioner Chair Dave Plyler.

In addition to the county, Corning is requesting up to \$453,300 in incentives from the city with a public hearing set for the next city council meeting on Oct. 3. The state's Economic Investment Committee approved a grant for up to \$1.93 million dollars over 12 years for Corning's planned expansion in the state, which will also include

105 new jobs at its Hickory plant where it will invest \$53.5 million over five years. Corning Optical Communications is a \$3 billion segment of Corning Incorporated, which employs 3,000 people throughout the state.

Commissioners also approved applications for Golden Leaf grants, which distribute state settlement money from tobacco manufacturers to projects that will help local economies. The county is applying for \$200,000 from Golden Leaf's open grants program to fund the county's infrastructure work for a proposed business park on Idols Road. County Manager Dudley Watts said it is one of several sources of funds the county is seeking for the project.

The county submitted three projects for Golden Leaf's Community Based Grants Initiative. In order of priority they are:

*\$500,000 for two new pre-k classrooms in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, which will be in schools where more than 55% of students receive free or reduced lunch.

* \$477,000 for Goler CDC's Workforce Technology Pathway 2020, that will provide IT training to 100 underemployed or unemployed residents.

* \$500,000 to cover part of the funds the city is providing for a Goler CDC hydroponics facility at Kimberley

Park to bring fresh produce to that community, which is in a food desert.

In addition, the county is submitting a letter of support for the Piedmont Triad Regional Council of Government applying for a Golden Leaf grant for its regional Revolving Loan Program for small and large businesses in downtowns and developed areas.

A submitted plan by Forsyth Technical Community College for an Advanced Manufacturing Mobile Classroom that would've traveled to local high schools was withdrawn from consideration by the college.

Commissioners are still working on a tethering ordinance that would ban unsupervised tethering of dogs, allowing animal control officers to give citations to those in violation. At a briefing last week, County Commissioner Ted Kaplan presented a draft with language like the Guilford County tethering ordinance with a one year roll-out period, which was supported by the Forsyth Animal Coalition. The commissioners couldn't come to an agreement on it and plan to keep discussing the issue.

The commissioners also approved a change in the time of their regular meetings from 4 p.m. to 2 p.m. starting Monday, Oct. 10.

Active and Healthy Brotherhood expands study

Local study that examines chronic disease in African-American males looks to reach more men

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

In an attempt to reach their goal to help 440 African-American males lead healthier lives, the Active and Healthy Brotherhood (AHB), the largest study in the country for chronic disease in African-American men, has reduced age requirements to 21.

Originally, the 16-week program offered by Gramercy Research Group located on North Point Blvd. was only open to black men between the ages of 30 and 64. Gramercy president and CEO Melicia C. Whitt-Glover said, after realizing that young people are starting to take their health more seriously, they decided to open up the program to a larger age group.

"We expanded to help reach our requirement and we realized that younger men are concerned about their health and the earlier you start healthy health behaviors, the better."

Whitt-Glover also noted the program has expanded to Greensboro and Charlotte as well. She said it is important that African-American men start paying more attention to their health because although rates of obesity, hypertension and diabetes

are down among most groups, black men are still seeing a rise in all three categories.

"When you look at life expectancy, black men on average die every 7 to 10 years less than other people," she continued. "Even when you take away violent crimes and things like that, black men are still dying at a higher rate from chronic disease and things that are preventable."

During the study, researchers will collect information from participants related to their physical health and activity. Throughout the study, participants will be provided with information on their overall health, healthy eating, physical activity, stress management, and how to get medical care when needed.

The program will also investigate ways to improve health behaviors using an intervention that has been designed specifically for African-American men. According to Whitt-Glover, the program also gives men a place to openly discuss their health issues.

"A couple of sessions address questions like why are you afraid to go to the doctor? What does it mean to be a man and healthy? Is it okay to admit that you're hurt and you need to go to the doctor?" she continued. "Because a lot of guys just think they can walk it off."

"Those are real questions that need to be asked. It's easy to say you need exercise or you need to eat better, but what does that really mean and how can you make that happen. That's what we talk about

in the brotherhood."

Along with learning ways to live healthier lives, participants in the program also receive other incentives including a full health profile and \$75 upon completion of the program. According to Whitt-Glover, AHB goes a step beyond what you get at a doctor's office.

"We go a step beyond. We measure your blood pressure, your kidney functioning, and then we tell you what your numbers mean," she said. "After completing the program, participants know exactly what the next step should be to live a healthy and productive life."

Whitt-Glover said many who have completed the program said it has changed their lives. She said many have also passed the word along about the program to friends and family members.

"Out of those who have finished the program, have only gave positive reviews," said Whitt-Glover. "It all comes down to asking yourself, how long do you want to be here?"

"The Active and Health Brotherhood is all about making sure are black men stay around as long as possible."

Open enrollment of AHB ends on Tuesday, Nov. 15. For more information or to sign up for the next session, contact Melicia Whitt-Glover via telephone at 336-293-8540, extension 110, or by email at mwhittglover@gramercyresearch.com.

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