

County's jobless rate unchanged in December

The Daily Advance

Chowan County's jobless rate was unchanged in December, according to the state Department of Commerce.

The department's Labor and Economic Analysis Division recently released its monthly report.

Chowan's rate in December remained at 6.7 percent. The county has the 78th highest rate statewide.

The report said Pasquotank County, with the 90th

highest jobless rate of 100 counties in the state, saw its rate drop from 7.8 percent in November to 7.7 percent in December.

Perquimans County, which has the 80th highest jobless rate in the state, saw its rate drop from 7.4 percent in November to 6.9 percent in December.

Also seeing its rate drop slightly was Camden County, the 55th highest jobless rate in the state, which went from 5.9 percent to 5.8 percent in the same time period.

The report said statewide, the non-seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 5.2 percent in December, a 0.2 decrease from November's revised rate, and a 1.4 percentage-point decline over the year.

The jobless rate fell in 56 counties, rose in 28 and was unchanged in 16. Graham County recorded December's highest jobless rate at 12.3 percent, followed by Scotland County at 10 percent.

Buncombe and Chatham counties had the lowest un-

employment rate at 3.8 percent, followed by Orange at 3.9 percent.

The report also broke down the jobless rates for metropolitan areas like Charlotte and Raleigh, and metropolitan statistical areas like Elizabeth City, whose rate dropped from 7.4 percent in November to 7.3 percent in December. A year ago in December 2013, Elizabeth City's rate was 8.4 percent.

The report also said the number of workers employed statewide, not sea-

sonally adjusted, decreased in December by over 56,000 to 4.32 million, while the number of those unemployed decreased just over 9,000 to nearly 239,000.

Since December 2013, the number of workers employed statewide increased 5,942 while those unemployed decreased 66,923.

"It is important to note that employment estimates are subject to large seasonal patterns; therefore it is advisable to focus on over-the-year changes in the not-sea-

sonally adjusted estimates," the report states.

In Pasquotank County, the labor force for December was 15,588, with 1,207 unemployed, which accounted for the 7.7 percent jobless rate.

In Perquimans, 338 were jobless out of a labor force of 4,878.

Currituck saw 692 unemployed in December out of a labor force of 12,626; Chowan had 375 jobless out of 5,596 workers; and Camden had 241 jobless out of a labor force of 4,141.

ORDINANCE

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ported to the board and the public at the meeting that in order to meet the bar for a moratorium, the county must have first exhausted all available options; proven the inadequacy of the existing ordinance; and cited an imminent threat to the county that the moratorium would be intended to address.

Surratt said he strongly believes the existing ordinance is inadequate based on things he has learned during the past year. His recommendation would be to take a new look at the wind energy ordinance, he said.

But based on the advice of the county attorney, it would appear not to be the role of the Planning Board to consider a moratorium, Surratt said. Any individual citizen may submit a moratorium proposal directly to the county commissioners, he said.

"That's not our function," Surratt said, referring to consideration of a moratorium.

But the board on a split vote announced it plans to review the county's wind energy ordinance.

Board member Jim Robison's motion passed 4-2, with members Bobby Winborne and William Monds voting against it.

Robison withdrew a previous motion that would have directed the chairman to draft a letter notifying the Chowan Board of Commissioners of the Planning Board's intention of reviewing the ordinance. That motion had sparked an intense discussion among the board regarding how individual members would be able to have input into the wording of the letter.

Near the beginning of the meeting, Winborne expressed frustration that some board members had received information or updates that he had not received. He said he was hearing about the legal advice regarding the moratorium for the first time even though some board members seemed already familiar with it.

"That's wrong," Winborne said.

Surratt said the purpose of the meeting was to make all the information available to the public and to the board. He added that he didn't have all the information himself until he got to the meeting, and he apologized to the other board members for that.

During a public comment period at the meeting, Gene Jordan, a farmer and member of the Edenton-Chowan Board of Education, told the board he was a farmer on an eighth-generation farm.

The family owns property in the area where the windmills are being proposed, so his family has investigated wind energy very carefully, he said. Jordan said his family brought a lot of different ideologies and perspectives to the investigation and asked a lot of questions.

When it was all done, though, the clear and simple answer was that a wind energy project was very much in the interest of farmers, Jordan said.

Jordan said that as a school board member he also has a special appreciation for the county's need for economic development.

"We need economic development," Jordan said. "That's what this is."

Robison objected to Tyson Utt, a representative of Apex Clean Energy, being allowed to speak during the forum. Robison said the purpose was to hear from citizens of Chowan County.

Board member Bobby Winborne disagreed, saying it was a public forum and anyone should be allowed to address the board.

Board member Jim Leggett noted Utt represents a company that is planning a project in the county.

But Robison was insistent.

"He is not a citizen of Chowan County," Robison said.

Surratt ruled that Utt

could address the board. Surratt added, however, that the comments should be focused on the content of the ordinance rather than on the question of a moratorium.

"We don't need a sales pitch," said local citizen Dossie Pruden, referring to Utt's speaking to the board. Pruden later addressed the board himself, saying he would like to see the county's wind energy ordinance be very restrictive.

Utt said Chowan's wind energy ordinance is fair and consistent with ordinances in other counties and with the state's model ordinance. Utt said the ordinance was updated a little more than a year ago and the public was able to provide input at that time.

The amendments to the ordinance were approved unanimously by the Chowan Board of Commissioners, Utt noted.

Utt mentioned that in addition to the county's permitting process, the project also would require permits from multiple state and federal agencies.

Michael Colton told the board that one way to get an idea of the visual impact of wind turbines is to go to the country club and look at the power lines going across the Albemarle Sound. Those towers are about 100 feet tall, he said. He suggested imaging that they were an-

other 500 feet tall, with huge rotating blades.

When you do something like that you realize that the wind turbines must give off major shadows and block vision, he said.

Another concern is birds, Colton said.

"Everybody knows that windmills whack birds," Colton said.

Colton said he was especially concerned about waterfowl on the sound, and the flight paths of migratory birds in the area.

But the main concern is the 600-foot height, Colton said. Windmills cast a huge, huge shadow, which would be a very good reason for limiting the height to 250 or 300 feet, he said.

Linda Peterson, a local resident who works with the Albemarle Resource Conservation and Development Council, said the Albemarle RC and D Council had looked very closely at sustainable energy and had created a website with current scientific information. Wind energy is a fast-moving industry that has been through a lot of changes, and those changes, Peterson said, are reflected in the up-to-date information at sustainable-energy-solutions-nc.org.

"There is a lot of old information and there is a lot of misinformation," she said, but the information on the sustainable energy solutions

website is current and reliable.

In addition to the website Peterson mentioned, there is information specific to the Timbermill project at Apex Clean Energy's project website: www.timbermillwind.com.

Also, researcher, activist and wind energy skeptic John Droz maintains a website, with links to various studies related to wind energy, at www.wisenergy.org.

William Mularie, a local resident who identified himself as a retired physicist and former visiting professor at the University of Minnesota, said he wanted to congratulate the Planning Board on its decision to get input from citizens and from other counties.

Peter Lolkema said he supports a moratorium. He said he is an environmental advocate and has observed wind energy up close in Europe. He thanked the Planning Board for taking the initiative to set up the public hearing.

Lolkema urged the board to make use of objective thought and information to protect public health and safety; quiet enjoyment of property; home values; crops and livestock; business, including tourism; bats and other wildlife; taxpayers and rate-payers; and the military.

REPORT CARD

Continued from 1A

Watch," he said.

A bright spot at John A. Holmes is the high school's partnership with College of the Albemarle that allows students to graduate with an associate degree at the college level at the same time they are earning their high school diplomas. Currently, 78.9 percent of Holmes seniors graduate in four years or less — an increase of about 14.7 percent since 2004.

Jackson has said pub-

licly that he will work tirelessly as superintendent toward a 100 percent graduation rate.

CMS Principal Tanya Turner, who was recently hired to become assistant superintendent of schools starting this summer, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Report Card results at the Feb. 9 school board meeting.

Turner explained that the letter grade each school received was based on a combination of an 80 percent achievement score and 20 percent growth score.

Scoring this year was based on a 15-point scale, Turner pointed out.

"Remember, the 15-point scale is for this year only," she reminded the board. "Beginning next year, the state will be using a 10-point scale."

Turner also emphasized the findings of an analysis done by the Raleigh News and Observer that found a strong link between the results and family income levels.

She quoted the newspaper article as drawing the conclusion that "schools with fewer low-income students were more likely to score As or Bs while high poverty schools were more likely to get Ds or Fs."

Overall, considering

the hardworking teachers at each of the county's four schools and the other individual achievements at each school, the letter grades received by the Edenton-Chowan Schools have been extremely disappointing, Turner said.

"This has been a hard hit for them," she told the school board.

The school system received the following letter grades: D.F. Walker Elementary, D; Chowan Middle School, D; and John A. Holmes, C. White Oak Elementary, which is a pre-K through second-grade school, was not required to be ranked.

Board member Gil Burroughs commented that the 10- and 15-point spreads used in calculat-

ing the results represented "an arbitrary number set by the legislature."

"It all depends on how you want to make things appear," he said. "If you put the 10 percent scale into play, which will happen next year, there would have been no schools to get an A and only two of them would have gotten a B this time."

"I share your concern," school board Chairman John Guard told Burroughs.

Jackson added that he did not think the letter grades accurately reflected the hard work of the teaching staff at the schools.

"That's disheartening to me," he said. "We'll continue to fight that fight."

GRANT

Continued from 1A

state. The grants-making programs of the division include assistance for building reuse and well as infrastructure including water and sewer.

CDBG is a U.S. Housing and Urban Development program that provides an annual allocation of funds for rural economic development and residential infrastructure projects. The CDBG economic development program provides grants to local governments for creating and retaining jobs. Funding for projects is based on the number of jobs to be created and the level of distress in the community applying for the funds.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be advised that the Town of Edenton is now accepting bids to mow the grass at the Northeastern Regional Airport.

Contract will be for cutting approximately 225 acres using airport equipment or contractor can bid using their equipment.

For details contact Bud Powell at 482-4415. All bids must be submitted by 3/16/15.



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NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

Albemarle Regional Solid Waste Management Authority

will hold a Board Meeting at
10:30 AM on Thurs., March 12th

at the
Perquimans Co. Recreation Center
310 Grandy St., Hertford.

A Perquimans Chowan Gates Landfill

Board Meeting will be held beginning
11:30 AM at the same location and date.

FMI CALL 252-338-4458 OR CONTACT ABLINDT@ARHS-NC.ORG

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