

Junior

From A1

sioner was sworn in at the Bertie County Commissioners' meeting earlier this week, and the junior school board member will be sworn in at the Bertie County Board of Education meeting next week.

It is key that the students who are interested in serving be willing to convey student opinion to both boards, and to report all board deliberations and actions to the student body.

There was a detailed application process, which included an in-

terview with central office staff, which recommended the student representatives to the superintendent's executive team for approval.

"The program will take Bertie County Schools Superintendent Dr. Catherine Edmonds' efforts to give students a voice to a whole new level," closed Bertie County Schools board member Bobby Occena.

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For the first time in history, a Junior School Board Member - JaCoya' Leary - and an Alternate Junior School Board Member - Haley Overton - were sworn in at the December board meeting. Pictured from left are Bertie County Schools Super-

intendent Dr. Catherine Edmonds, board members Bobby Occena and Rickey Freeman, Overton, Chair Tarsha Dudley, Leary and board members Christine Dudley and Norman Cherry Sr.

Vidant

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ments to health care networks, and hit those serving rural areas like eastern North Carolina particularly hard, according to Dr. Waldrum and Harvill.

"I think the way we see all of this activity is really threatening to our communities, and when we look at what is going on with the state and with Blue Cross and Blue Shield, it is really threatening our mission," Dr. Waldrum said. "Our mission is to improve the health and well-being of eastern North Carolina. These actions really threaten that."

He said Vidant is involved in economic development, education and taking care of people when they are sick.

"We are very proud of the work we do with and as part of our communities," Dr. Waldrum said. "I always say of Vidant Health we are eastern North Carolina taking care of eastern North Carolina."

Dr. Waldrum said it is too easy for people who live in Raleigh to make decisions without knowing how it affects small communities such as those Vidant Health serves.

"I think it's easy when these kind of really large draconian policies get made from people that live in Raleigh to not understand how it affects communities like Windsor, Edenton, Ahoskie and Tarboro," he said.

"I get really concerned because they talk about this as cutting hospitals, but hospitals are really places where health care workers come. Our money is spent on people taking care of other people.

"When they are talking about cutting hospitals, they are really talking about our capability of employing nurses, doctors and technicians and people who provide services to this community," he said. "That is what we see as being under attack."

He said people in Raleigh have accused him and other health care people about claiming the sky is falling, but it is true that hospitals are closing in rural North Carolina - including one closed by Vidant in Belhaven - as well as limiting services offered.

Dr. Waldrum said he felt Windsor was a good place to talk about the struggles of providing health care in rural eastern North Carolina.

"Taking a \$40 million decrease in reimbursement from the State Health Plan really threatens us and what we can do in these already very challenged environments," Dr. Waldrum said. "When I say challenged environments, that's not me expressing an opinion, I think that's just a fact based on hospitals closing and having a difficult time.

"I think being in Ber-

tie County is probably one of the most significant places you can be to talk about that," he continued. "This is a really hard market. We want to be part of supporting this region and this county, but when our legislators make actions like this it really threatens our ability to do that."

Dr. Waldrum said he had spoken with legislators about the issues, and told them if it happens Vidant Health will have to make "hard decisions." He said it wouldn't be Vidant's choice, but simply a reaction to the State Treasurer's action.

Dr. Waldrum said he is not discounting the issues raised by the State Treasurer, but doesn't believe a "hatchet" is the way to rectify the problem. He also said the State Treasurer has talked about the averages, but northeastern North Carolina isn't average.

"Eastern North Carolina is one of the most underserved health care markets in the country," he said. "We've got great people constantly looking at how we best serve our communities and do what we can do responsibly with limited resources and this threatens that."

Dr. Waldrum also produced documents sought from the State Treasurer which were either fully redacted or almost completely redacted.

"You're not sharing how you want to save

money on health care to the people who provide health care," he said.

Dr. Waldrum said the State Treasurer is working in conjunction with Blue Cross & Blue Shield of North Carolina. He said Vidant Health asked how much the company has been paid in administrative fees from the State Health Plan, and the document was fully redacted.

"The fees the state has Blue Cross to create a monopolist called Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina over a 30-year relationship that they've had, we don't have clarity and transparency about that relationship," Dr. Waldrum said.

He said Vidant's goal is to get everyone together to create a plan which will work for everyone.

"We think that our legislators and health care providers, we all need to get together and craft a better plan than just using a hatchet because this plan affects rural communities more adversely than urban communities," he said. "That's what we're asking out legislator for."

Dr. Waldrum also indicated state retirees who have moved to other states, those health care facilities receive none of the proposed cuts. He said the fact means larger cuts have to be made elsewhere to reach the average the state trea-

asurer mentions. The treasurer provided no information about how much is spent in other states.

"North Carolinians are subsidizing the health care in Tennessee, Florida, South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia and we have no clarity of how much that is happening," Dr. Waldrum said.

Vidant will have to take a close look at all services provided should the cuts come to fruition, Dr. Waldrum admitted. He expounded by saying some rural health care agencies have stopped services such as delivering babies.

Vidant Chowan Hospital in Edenton and Vidant Roanoke Chowan Hospital in Ahoskie, still provides OB services, and serves at the majority of Bertie County.

Harvill said last year Vidant Chowan delivered approximately 325 babies.

"That's less than a baby a day and we have to have nurses and doctors and everybody there," Dr. Waldrum said. "We don't make money on that. If you're pregnant in this part of the country, if we weren't delivering babies, you'd be driving an hour."

Dr. Waldrum said he wasn't trying to indicate Vidant Health would stop delivering babies in smaller communities because no decision has been made. He said a group

of people is working to see what will have to happen if the cuts occur.

"We're going to survive. As a company we will survive because we will do things we have to do to survive," he said. "Does that mean closing a hospital or closing OB services or those kind of very specific things? We don't know."

"We will be looking at what we have to do to react," he continued. "I think that reaction will play out in communities, and will play out in people either not having jobs or not having services, so that's what this is about. I think that's really important."

"We don't have a plan, but we can't absorb \$40 million in decreased reimbursement," he said. "It will really hurt us."

Harvill said locally Vidant Bertie Hospital and Vidant Chowan Hospital do not have the margins to survive on their own, and must do so as part of the system.

Thus, Harvill said, a \$40 million cut to the system could cause major issues for the two local hospitals.

Those wishing to learn more about the issue or assist Vidant in its quest to stop the cuts can visit www.vidanthealth.com.

Thadd White can be reached via email at twhite@ncweeklies.com.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING MONDAY, JANUARY 7, 2019 6:00 PM Bertie County Tri-County Airport Height Restriction Ordinance

The Bertie County Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing to provide citizens an opportunity to comment on the proposed Tri-County Airport Height Restriction Ordinance. It has been found that an airport hazard endangers the lives and property of users of the airport and of occupants of land in its vicinity, and also, of the obstruction type, in effect reduces the size of the area available for the landing, taking off and maneuvering of aircraft, thus tending to destroy or impair the utility of the airport and the public investment therein, and is therefore not in the interest of the public health, public safety, or general welfare (§ 63-30). For the purpose of promoting health, safety, and the general welfare of the public, a county may adopt zoning and development regulation ordinances (§ 153A-340). The Ordinance, upon adoption, will regulate the height of structures within the proposed zoning area as shown on the associated zoning map. In lieu of this criminal penalty, the responsible person may be subject to a civil penalty pursuant to N.C.G.S. 1530A-123(c) in the amount of \$1,000 per day for each day the violation continues, recoverable by the County Zoning Board of Adjustment through its Administrator in a civil action in the nature of a debt. In addition to all other remedies available either at law or in equity, the County Zoning Board of Adjustment through its Administrator may institute an action in the General Court of Justice seeking enforcement of the ordinance by injunction or order of abatement, or both, pursuant to N.C.G.S. 153A-123(d) and (e).

A public hearing will be held on Monday, January 7, 2019 at 6:00 PM in the County Administration Building, Commissioners Meeting Room, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, North Carolina. The proposed ordinance and zoning map may be found online on the Bertie County website and in the County Manager's Office, 106 Dundee Street, Windsor, NC. Questions may be directed to Traci White, Planning Director, at (252)794-6185 or traci.white@bertie.nc.gov.

AREA SUBJECT TO THE TRI-COUNTY AIRPORT HEIGHT RESTRICTION ORDINANCE

