

**MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING
LEXINGTON COUNTY COUNCIL
NOVEMBER 13, 2003**

Lexington County Council held a special meeting on Thursday, November 13, 2003 in Council Chambers, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Chairman Davis presided and gave the invocation; Mr. Wilkerson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members attending: George H. Smokey Davis William C. Billy Derrick
 Bobby C. Keisler Johnny W. Jeffcoat
 M. Todd Cullum Jacob R. Wilkerson
 John W. Carrigg, Jr. Joseph W. Joe Owens

Member not present: Bruce E. Rucker*

*Mr. Rucker was absent because of a prior commitment.

Also attending: Art Brooks, County Administrator; Larry Porth, Finance Director/Deputy County Administrator; Katherine Doucett, Personnel Director/Deputy County Administrator; Jeff Anderson, County Attorney; other staff members, citizens of the county and representatives of the media.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, a copy of the agenda was sent to radio and TV stations, newspapers, and posted on the bulletin board located in the lobby of the County Administration Building.

Vehicle Policy - Mr. Davis stated the reason for the special meeting was to review the Vehicle Policy that is currently part of the policies for the County of Lexington in an effort to see if there are ways the County can save money on vehicles.

Mr. Derrick stated the County has some excellent policies in place by the Sheriff's Department as well as the County as a whole. Mr. Derrick indicated he was not sure if some of the vehicle take-home usage hasn't been adopted during the course of time as a perk to make up the difference as salaries are concerned. He stated he is very interested in the Comp and Class to make sure vehicle use is part of the study. He stated he would like to see a couple of restrictions added to the current Vehicle Policy to eliminate some usage that is not appropriate for the benefit of the County. He said staff that should be allowed to drive a vehicle home would be department heads with Public Safety responsibility, personnel on call, not necessarily a person on call every six weeks, but the personnel on call during that period of time, and other specific personnel that the County Administrator approves whose responsibilities determine

to be beneficial to the County by driving a vehicle home. He stated he was looking at the vehicle, not whether it is beneficial to the individual, but beneficial to the County to be driven home and whether it would reduce response time when they might have to come back during emergency situations. He stated the County Administrator may need to change some language in the current Vehicle Policy and be very specific and administer the policy then it would eliminate his concern regarding vehicle usage.

Mr. Jeffcoat stated it seems rather than give a 3 percent raise, we give a car. He stated if that's true, we need to correct that. He stated the Vehicle Policy the County has in place is very comprehensive but could be tweaked. He asked whether the County has enough cars and asked how many employees the County has.

Mr. Brooks replied 1200.

Mr. Jeffcoat stated the County has 350 plus vehicles, so every fourth person gets a car.

Mr. Brooks replied they are not all assigned to a person but a motor pool.

Mr. Jeffcoat asked how many cars were in the motor pool.

Mr. Brooks replied 28.

Mr. Jeffcoat stated the County has 28 vehicles staff can check out. He stated for instance, the Solicitor's Office has nine or ten vehicles.

Mr. Brooks replied the Solicitor's Office has nine in one fund and one in another revenue fund.

Mr. Jeffcoat stated if we (staff) talked with department heads and asked them to review the number of vehicles they have, we may be surprised how many vehicles we don't need that could be placed into the motor pool to be checked out. He stated in reading some of the justifications for driving a vehicle home states "because they are on call once a month." He stated it was most comical to him that we (County) would furnish an automobile.

He stated he asked one individual who has an automobile "why do you have an automobile?" The answer was "because I have to go out and interview a person occasionally." That's why he has a car. That is no reason to have a car. That reason alone would be to check out a car; do the interview; come back; or if he wants to use his personal car, we (County) could pay mileage rather than furnish a car. He indicated this is the type situation that he has "heartburn" over. He stated if we (staff) asked department heads to really take a look at what they have as far as automobiles, possibly we can trim some. He stated we (Council) are not trying to micro-manage; if this is what you feel like we need to have, then that's fine. But with the economic times we are experiencing right now I think it is time for us to take a look not only at automobiles but other items, with this being one of the major expenses in the County.

Mr. Carrigg stated he agreed with Mr. Jeffcoat that we (County) have picked up these cars over the years with positions, either through grants, etc., and we just keep buying them. He stated we don't necessarily have to and feels we need to look at how to do more with less. He stated we (County) need to find some money somewhere.

Mr. Carrigg said one of the things he has learned about one of our neighboring counties in reviewing their automobile policy was the distance the vehicle was going to be driven home and stated that should be an important factor. He stated from the information provided, some vehicles are being driven 90 miles, 85 miles, etc. a day round trip to and from home. He noted the gas and wear and tear on the vehicle is pretty heavy and does not think the County should pay for that. Mr. Carrigg stated we (County) may need an amendment to the policy. He stated the policy he was referring to is the Aiken County Sheriff's Department's vehicle supply policy. He stated in that policy deputies who drive vehicles home are on call 24/7 and subject to call out at anytime. However, if they drive more than 30 miles round trip, then the vehicle can only be driven home by special permission of the Sheriff. Mr. Carrigg indicated the County may not want 30 miles but should adopt something as far as round trip mileage.

Mr. Carrigg stated Council has been provided a lot of information, but noted the one thing missing is the recommendation of the department heads regarding the need of these vehicles and feels that is important. He said he certainly didn't want to put more work on our department heads but would like to see a recommendation from them justifying the need of the vehicle driven home. He stated that would give Council a better starting point than Council trying to figure out whether a particular individual in a particular job warrants having a car or not.

Mr. Owens stated if you extrapolate the mileage, that is roughly 24,000 miles a year; four years a car has 100,000 miles if it is driven 85 miles to work. He said the life of the car is gone in four years.

Mr. Owens said what he would like answered is - is it a perk or is it being used because they are really on call. He stated that would decide who needs a car, who should have a car, who doesn't need a car, and is once a month on call sufficient to warrant a car to be driven home every night. He indicated if that is the policy, that's a far reach. Mr. Owens stated he would like to know if the County has any regular tags on County vehicles.

Mr. Ellis Gammons, Fleet Manager, stated the two departments other than the Sheriff's Department that uses classified tags are the Coroner's and Solicitor's Office.

Mr. Owens stated all three of those departments can be considered law enforcement and asked if anybody else in the County is driving a County vehicle that has a plain tag.

Mr. Ellis replied to my knowledge at this time, no; everything is a CG tag.

Mr. Cullum stated he was in agreement with Mr. Carrigg that each department head needs to make some

justification, and believe Council asked for that, but from what he has read does not see any justification on any of them. He stated the number one thing that he took from the questionnaire was if a vehicle was not driven home, describe the impact. He said the impact to him says what sort of service would not take place to the taxpayers of this County if that vehicle was not driven home. He stated he doesn't know of any one reason that service would not be provided with the vehicle not being driven home. Mr. Cullum said in asking the department heads to justify the use of the vehicle from the subordinate that we need to go a step further and ask the department heads to justify the use of their vehicle. He stated a number of the justifications listed on their questionnaire indicate they are on call and would be very interested in knowing how often they are on call. He stated "on call" is very subjective. He indicated on call once a year, or do you respond to calls once a week, or are you responding to calls once a month are going to provide justification in use. Mr. Cullum stated with 1200 employees in the County the County has provided a vehicle to several employees with no costs to them for maintenance, gas, payments, property taxes and feels that it is more than a cost issue but a fairness issue to all the employees of the County and a fairness issue to the taxpayers of this County. He said he does not look at it as a perk, as he doesn't think government has perks. He stated you are in the government business because you are in the service business.

Mr. Wilkerson asked how many vehicles are driven home.

Mr. Brooks replied 265.

Mr. Wilkerson stated he feels the County needs to set policies in place that would be equal and fair to everybody and agreed mileage of a certain distance is a good idea. He stated he was not one who likes to micro-manage but feels there are a lot of individuals who need to drive cars home for different reasons, but also feels there are a lot of cars that are being driven home that do not need to be driven home. He stated he feels the ones that are legitimately driven home and needed on the weekends and after hours are the cars that we really need and need the individuals to have. He stated we do need some cars in the County, but there is no doubt that we have more than what we need right now, we just need to find out which ones we really need and which ones we need to get rid of.

Mr. Derrick stated one of the comments written for justification for usage states "not driving this vehicle home would make me unavailable for after hours responses to the aforementioned cause." He said he was sure that our job descriptions take care of that and is surprised that anybody would write that down for a justification for driving a vehicle home.

Mr. Derrick made a motion seconded by Mr. Jeffcoat to ask the Administrator to incorporate the Comp and Class portions of the study, along with all the comments made tonight, and during next year's budget process take a look at the County's Vehicle Policy to see if there is an opportunity to alleviate some of this expense.

Mr. Davis opened the meeting for discussion.

Mr. Davis stated on page 2 of the Vehicle Management Policy it states "that the Administrator will

determine and assess the need for each individual vehicle” and he would like to include in the Vehicle Policy that the Administrator report his findings to Council annually to make Council fully aware of the justifications.

Mr. Cullum asked if this is the first time there has ever been any request for justification for the use of these vehicles? He stated the Vehicle Policy indicates it was established in 1986 and revised in 1998.

Mr. Davis stated he was sure that an assessment had been done but, to his knowledge in the last seven years, Council has not specifically asked for justification or review of the policy.

Mr. Wilkerson stated it has been on the books and looked at but has not been looked at closely in a while.

Mr. Cullum stated the Vehicle Policy states “a complete in depth justification as to why the vehicle needs to be assigned, how it will benefit Lexington County, how many personal miles will be driven, and how long the assigned request is for.” He stated all the reports are dated this year.

Mr. Brooks replied all those reports were developed for several reasons. One was to make sure that each employee was driving a County vehicle, whether it was commuting or during the course of the day, had read the Vehicle Policy because there were some questions as to the actual use of the vehicle. He stated when someone has the commuting ability with the vehicle that is strictly it. It is not intended for personal use. Mr. Brooks said there were some questions as to whether we (County) had some abuse regarding personal use so we wanted to make sure that everyone signed that they had read the Vehicle Policy and we took the opportunity to have the justification part restated. He stated the form was put forth because Council is putting an emphasis on vehicle use. He stated we (staff) will certainly do what Council wants with these vehicles and will be glad to go back and look at each individual assigned a vehicle and have department heads justify how often they are on call and come back with a recommendation to Council.

Mr. Jeffcoat stated it seems the requests for four-wheel drive has really picked up in the last year or two. He stated he recently rode with a Public Works employee, and traveled through some pretty rough roads and some off roads, and noticed that his vehicle was not four-wheel drive. He asked him why he did not have four-wheel drive and if he ever gets stuck and was told yes, and then I have to call someone to pull me out. Mr. Jeffcoat stated he knows of a situation where there is an employee with four-wheel drive but does not know how he justifies one, yet we have a Public Works employee that really needs four-wheel drive but does not have one. He said he realizes that seems like a small example, but if we multiply that by 360 times it can get pretty far off the base we want to be on. He asked Mr. Brooks if some of these vehicles were purchased through grants. He stated once they are purchased through grants we then have to pick up the maintenance and insurance; once the grant has expired we continue having this vehicle and then we are at the point where we are today because they have accumulated to some degree and asked could that be part of the situation we are talking about here.

Mr. Brooks replied in some cases there are grants available that include a vehicle. He said when the vehicle wears out then it is back in the budget to be replaced and this continues on.

Mr. Jeffcoat stated it is sort of a “sleeping giant.” We could say it goes away and goes to sleep and we continue to nurture the baby so to speak. Mr. Jeffcoat said Council needs to remember those types of situation when approving grants, vehicles, etc.

Mr. Owens stated he has a 15-person public works crew maintaining 200 plus miles of water lines, half that in sewer lines, and we have no four-wheel drives; never has been one. He stated he really has a problem with this need for four-wheel drive vehicles.

Mr. Owens stated he would like to incorporate into Mr. Derrick’s motion as to when the last time some of these employees were called out who claim that this is part of the reasoning for driving the vehicle home and how many times they have been called out and how many miles have they driven after hours on call in the past year.

Mr. Derrick stated his motion was to take into consideration all comments made during this discussion and incorporate them into the policy.

Mr. Cullum stated the reason the County is in the situation it is now is because there are a number of vehicles that are actually in our fleet because of grant programs and also understand that those grants continue carrying on. He asked Mr. Brooks how many of those grants apply to any of the administrative staff other than Fire Service and Law Enforcement.

Mr. Brooks replied, none. Primarily Law Enforcement/Public Safety.

Mr. Wilkerson stated he did not want comments he made previously to be taken the wrong way. He stated a lot of these vehicles, most of them he feels are needed. However, when you look through the justification information provided, many vehicles are driven over 80 or 90 miles by individuals who are on call once very four or five weeks. He asked why can’t they take a vehicle home once every four or five weeks when they are on call. He stated that is the type of thing that Council is concerned with, not the ones that are really needed.

In order to clarify the motion presented by Mr. Derrick and seconded by Mr. Jeffcoat, the motion consists of the following:

- (1) To include vehicle use into the Comp and Class study.
- (2) To restrict vehicles driven home to department heads with Public Safety responsibility, personnel on call, not necessarily a person on call every six weeks but the personnel on call during that period of time, and other specific personnel that the County Administrator approves whose responsibilities determine to be beneficial to the County by diving a vehicle home.
- (3) To adopt a round trip mileage for vehicles driven home.

- (4) To have the department heads justify vehicles used in their departments that are driven home.
- (5) To have the department heads justify the use of their vehicle.
- (6) To have the Administrator determine and assess the need for each individual vehicle and report his findings to Council annually to make Council fully aware of the justifications.
- (7) To look closely at the justification for four-wheel drive vehicles.
- (8) To have department heads assess how many times employees with vehicles have been called out and how many miles driven after hours on call in the past year.
- (9) To be more aware of approving grants that include a vehicle.

In Favor: Mr. Davis Mr. Derrick
 Mr. Jeffcoat Mr. Wilkerson
 Mr. Keisler Mr. Carrigg
 Mr. Owens Mr. Cullum

Mr. Davis stated this discussion will continue during the budget process to make some serious changes.

Communication Equipment - Mr. Davis stated the information contained in the material provided Council included Law Enforcement numbers and for security reasons would not be released at this time. He stated the information may be released at a later date when the security sensitive numbers are deleted.

Mr. Derrick stated if you look at all the telephones, pagers, mobile phones, and 800 MHZ radios, we (County) have a tremendous number. He stated technology has evolved over the years that can greatly reduce the need of these. He stated mobile phones now have the capability of being text writers so we can combine services. He said telephone technology now allows for a lesser number of phone lines in a department by being able to transfer calls to the individual so every individual does not have a phone sitting on their desk with a dedicated line. He indicated we may be able to eliminate some 800 MHZ radios that are used simply for notification by replacing with pagers or portable phones. He stated an 800 MHZ radio costs the County approximately \$600.00 a year where as pagers costs approximately \$11.00 a month. He said he had the privilege of speaking with Chief James today who suggested the County needs to look at a comprehensive plan for the entire County so all of our communications are negotiated as a group. He stated before the budget process he would like for staff to take a comprehensive look at all the County's communications needs with the department heads and make sure we are getting the best deal for our money. He stated if it costs money to put in new technology that will save us money in five years, lets look at that if that's a possibility. He stated in his conversation with Chief James he stated he has employees who have to carry two telephones because the Nextel and Alltel doesn't do the job, but Verizon may. He asked staff to investigate that as well.

Mr. Derrick made a motion seconded by Mr. Wilkerson that between now and the budget process that staff assemble a group of employees from all the departments to take a comprehensive look at all communications needs and to see if other vendors can provide the product at a lower cost and to negotiate with Motorola to obtain a better rate.

Mr. Davis opened the meeting for discussion.

Mr. Owens asked why this hasn't been done before.

Mr. Wilkerson replied technology has changed so much in the past ten years that some of the things we are using have become obsolete and we can probably do away with some things but we haven't looked at it. Again, he stated the reason for that is because technology has changed so fast.

Mr. Derrick stated a prime example of that is the push-to-talk phone on Verizon which he indicated the technology is only two months old.

Mr. Carrigg asked to comment on Mr. Owens' statement as to why communications have not been looked at before. Mr. Carrigg stated he does not know if it hasn't been looked at and did not know if the department heads have not done a good job with making sure that we only purchased what was needed. He indicated we (Council) are trying to take a more general look at the County as a whole as opposed to trying to micro-manage departments but does not know that if at the end you won't find that our department heads have done a good fugal job with money. He stated this does not serve as an indictment of how well they have done their job.

Mr. Wilkerson asked Mr. Owens if he was talking about Council or the department heads looking at communications. Mr. Wilkerson stated that is two different things.

Mr. Owens replied, Council.

Mr. Brooks stated technology is changing every year. He indicated approximately three years ago, the County purchased Nextels. He said approximately seven years ago the County evaluated the 800 MHZ system and Council decided to completely replace the analog system with the 800 MHZ system enabling coverage throughout the County. He agreed with Mr. Carrigg that probably now is the time to comprehensively look at putting it all together County-wide.

Mr. Cullum stated this is not a small item for discussion. He indicated this is a \$500,000 plus service.

Mr. Derrick corrected Mr. Cullum indicating it is \$1.264 million.

Mr. Cullum stated this is only for us to talk to each other in one county, state-wide.

Mr. Cullum asked if the \$1.264 million included service, hardware, etc.

Mr. Porth, Finance Director, replied not hardware; just service.

Mr. Jeffcoat stated the motion as he understood is for Council to recommend that staff look at consolidating all communications equipment at a lesser price.

In Favor: Mr. Davis Mr. Derrick
 Mr. Wilkerson Mr. Carrigg
 Mr. Keisler Mr. Jeffcoat
 Mr. Cullum Mr. Owens

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Dorothy K. Black
Clerk

George H. Smokey Davis
Chairman