



OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONERS AND MANAGER

500 N. Main St., Room 921 • Monroe, NC 28112 • Phone (704)283-3810 • Fax (704)282-0121

News Release

Union County Board of Commissioners Votes to Expand Legal Team

May 18, 2015 Monroe, NC – The Union County Board of Commissioners voted Monday night as a proactive measure to expand the County’s legal resources through a contract with the law firm Womble, Carlyle, Sandridge and Rice. Accomplished trial attorneys Jim Cooney and Mike Barnhill will represent the firm in the partnership with Union County.

“I recognize an improving relationship between the two boards, but based on recent developments, we believe it is important to expand our legal resources,” said Chairman Richard Helms of Union County. “There is still uncertainty surrounding potential legal action by the Board of Education over the 2013-14 County Budget.

Based upon the significant increase of the Board of Education’s budget request for 2015-16, the Board of County Commissioners feels it needs to be proactive to protect the taxpayers of Union County.”

In his presentation, County Attorney Ligon Bundy reminded commissioners and staff that two years ago the taxpayers were faced with a huge judgment after the trial with the School Board. When the County appealed the decision, the Board of Commissioners did the right thing and voted to expand the legal team with attorneys who specialize in appellate work to assist in appealing the judgment to the North Carolina Court of Appeals.

“It was an investment, but the County won the appeal, and this has saved the taxpayers approximately \$73 million,” Bundy said. “I believe taxpayers understand that spending approximately \$160 thousand in order to save \$73 million is a good return on the investment and protects their tax dollars.”

Since the trial, County Manager Cindy Coto and County staff have implemented a strategic communication plan using its cable access channel, UCTV 16, and a variety of social media platforms to create greater transparency in the budget process and raise awareness on how residents can access County services.

“For the past two budget cycles, the County Finance Division created a Citizen’s Annual Financial Report (CAFR) and the Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR) to summarize the detailed County Budget,” Coto said. “Both reports have won consecutive national awards for outstanding budget reporting by a local government. These reports were created to give greater transparency and to help the taxpayer easily understand how their money was spent.”

The County's Annual Financial Reports are available online at www.unioncountync.gov or by calling 704.283.3500. Residents with questions or comments on the budget process are invited to contact the County Manager at askthecountymanager@unioncountync.gov.

During the meeting, the Board of Commissioners also made a public request to the Board of Education for a joint meeting the week of May 25 so the Union County Public Schools can present and discuss their 2015-16 budget request.

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