

Clint Conner
Bertie County 4-H

Youth Summit Commissioner Interview

For part of my application, I had the opportunity of interviewing Commissioner Ronald “Ron” Wesson. This interview was insightful to the many aspects of being a county commissioner. Mr. Wesson was elected by the largest majority percentage of any county commissioner in the state of North Carolina with seventy-percent of the vote.

Q. “How long have you served on the Board of Commissioners? Will you run for reelection when your current term expires?”

A. “The commissioner terms here are four year terms, so I am about halfway through my first term. For the second part of the question, I can not really say if I will run again for reelection. When I ran for my first term, I knew that I did not want to make this a career and I just wanted this to be a public service for the community.”

Q. “What would you recommend to someone interested in becoming a commissioner, e.g., college major?”

A. “I do not think that a person should look to become a commissioner as a job, instead, he or she should go to college for whatever he or she has a passion for. This being said, I have a business background, Mr. Trent has an entrepreneurship background, Mr. Perry has a vast knowledge of the county, and Mr. Harrell works for the largest employer in the county; this creates a diversity that is imperative.”

Q. “According to the 2012 USDA Economic Research Service Census Report for Bertie County, the poverty rate for all people was 27% and the poverty rate for children ages 0-17 was 37.8%. Are there any local relief programs that pursue to alleviate this problem? If so, does the Board advocate for it?”

A. “First of all, the social services, which is DSS, is the largest agency that we fund in all county government. In addition to that, we, through the Mid-East Commission which serves a five-county area, fund programs in our county. For example, the lunches that go to poverty-stricken citizens and the senior center are funded through the Mid-East Commission.”

Q. “As shown below, Bertie County’s high schools perform at a lower level than the state level. Are there any local initiatives that strive to fill-in this educational gap? If so, does the Board advocate for it?”

North Carolina End-of-Grade tests	English II	Math I	Biology
State	51.2%	36.3%	45.6%
County	43.6%	22.9%	26.2%

(This table shows the percentage of students that score at or above grade level on end-of-grade tests for the state and county scale according to <http://www.ncschoolreportcard.org/src/>. Bertie High School, Bertie Early College High School, and Bertie STEM High School’s percentages are averaged together for the county percentage.)

A. “Whenever a corporation is looking to start somewhere, they will look at the quality of life at a certain place, and these scores affect the chance for new corporations to come to this area. With that being said, Bertie County has three high schools that specialize on different focuses. For instance, Bertie STEM High School specializes in areas of the STEM career field, so corporations will take that into consideration when looking here. This is why it is important that the quality of life is thriving, so we do fund the Bertie County Board of Education; although, this is only a small fraction of funding that it receives.”

Q. “What are your local priorities, or what county issues hold the most importance to you?”

A. “I think number one is economic development, and we want Bertie County to be the best Bertie County that it we be. That is why we invest in four major areas around economic development. The first one is we want to do something in the energy place, because it is a fast and promising opportunity. This will hopefully cut the cost of energy bills in half which would result in more interest in our area for corporations. The second one is a green fertilizer plant, because there is not one in our market. The third one is tourism adventure, which comprises of hunting, fishing, and kayaking, due to our access of the Roanoke River, Cashie River, and Albemarle Sound. The fourth one is development of the Albemarle Sound when the market turns around.”

Q. “Where do you envision Bertie County in 2020?”

A. “I see Bertie County growing due to the investment in the four areas around economic development as I just mentioned earlier and our citizens becoming more involved by having separate boards for each

of the four areas. This investment and involvement in our county will result in Bertie County thriving and being the best that it can be.”

Q. “What are some of the responsibilities for county governments that you were not aware of when you ran for office?”

A. “ I was aware of much of the responsibilities of being a commissioner by attending monthly commissioner meetings before being a commissioner, but I did not know the amount of work that goes into this service.”

Q. “What are the hardest decisions you’ve faced as a county commissioner?”

A. “One of the hardest decisions that I have faced as a county commissioner was when I was in favor for a door-to-door county garbage pick-up. As I said earlier, the Board is diverse and can not agree about everything that comes its way.”