

Lilley Brookshire, Stanly County, NC

Report for NCACC Summit in Asheville, NC, August 15-16, 2014

For my report, I met with Mr. Andy Lucas, County manager in Stanly County, NC and attended a County commissioners meeting. Mr. Lucas gave me a tour of the County offices located in Stanly Commons, including the attorney's office, clerk to the board's office, reception area, and commissioners' hall for monthly board meetings, which are open to the public.

Did you know Stanly County's county manager, Andy Lucas, has two undergrad degrees, one in criminal justice and one in sociology, and a Masters in Public Administration? I didn't, until I interviewed him. Here's what else I learned.

What exactly does the county manager do? A county manager works for the county commissioner board. The County Manager fulfills the agenda of the board, including overseeing the county budget.

How does the county manager interact with and report to the county commissioners? Mr. Lucas posts a weekly bulletin to report key developments, statistics and other information to the board. In addition, he attends board meetings and participates in informal meetings with commissioners.

How does the annual budget process work? In February of each year, the board plans a retreat and talks about what they want to accomplish in the coming year. Then the county manager works with the information to make it work with the budget. He/she then talks to people who run county funded offices and finds out about how much money they anticipate needing and submits the budget to the board. The budget is tweaked over the next few months and is set by June 1st.

Who does Mr. Lucas work with when drafting the budget? He works with all department heads, the finance director and the human resources director for the county.

I attended the County Commissioners' meeting on Monday, July 14th. There were about 25 people present for the meeting. The Chairperson, Mr. Tony Dennis, welcomed everyone and Mr. Josh Morton led the invocation. Mr. Gene McIntyre introduced me to the board and the audience and explained that I would be representing the county at the NCACC in Asheville in August.

There were several items on the agenda including a consideration from the Economic Development Commission about Project Stella. The board was considering and approved tax breaks for a new company that is going to open in Badin, NC at the old ALCOA plant and plans to have 150 new jobs.

The Director for Rocky River Rural Planning Organization presented the Strategic Transportation Investment update. She was not optimistic that any major road projects are going to meet the budget in NC. She said that Stanly County is at a disadvantage because it is in the greater Charlotte area and so most of the money goes to Charlotte and other highly populated areas. I can understand this because those roads are the ones that are the most traveled. However, if the roads in the rural areas are not

improved, they have a more difficult time bringing more jobs to the area which in turn impacts other resources in the area.

The board and committee appointments were announced by Mr. Lucas including Environmental Affairs Board, Department of Social Services Board- Nancy Smokes, and Board of Health- Dr. K. Little. Mr. Gene McIntyre will be the commissioner who represents the board at the NCACC summit in Asheville, NC in August.

A community member presented a concern to the board and asked for their help. She reported that there are some neighborhood boys on Tom Road who shoot at her house. She has reported this to the sheriff's office which has tried to help but since school has been out the problem has escalated. There were several people there to support her and she brought a petition with her from about 50 people in the area that is affected. The board said that they would look into the matter and see what they can do to assist with the problem. Although we haven't been harassed my people shooting at our house, my family is concerned about people shooting as well. We have several people in our neighborhood, which is in the city limits of New London, who have target practice. We like to play in the woods behind our house but are scared to some times because we don't want to get hit by a bullet. I think it would be helpful if there was better control of this in more populated areas. There is plenty of open space in our area where people can practice shooting without putting other people in danger.

The library and facilities sent a list of items that they wanted to declare surplus and sold. Monthly financial reports were accepted as well as vehicle tax refunds.

The board then closed the meeting from the public in order to instruct the staff on actions to take on items discussed.

As a girl, the one thing that stood out to me was that almost everyone in a position of power was a white man. In addition, they were all between 50-73 years old. Although your age and gender doesn't mean that you aren't open-minded, it is difficult if not impossible to really understand where people who are different from you are coming from. It is hard growing up in a county where values and expectations for girls/women are limited. It can also be discouraging growing up in a county where the older generations are making decisions about the future of the county because they may not be aware of what other generations are concerned about and want to see happen. Issues like protecting the environment and the importance of technology improvements may not get the attention that is needed to improve our county and keep up with the rest of the country. When I hear commissioners still pushing the idea that we need to encourage manufacturing, it concerns me because many young people are looking for other ways to support themselves and plan their careers.

I know that diversity is an issue that people consider on a lot of different levels. My hope is that the NCACC Summit will be a place where work is done to change the 'face' of county commissioner boards. The first step to making sure everyone's voice is heard is to have people on the board who represent more of the population. Women and minorities need to be encouraged and supported in their efforts to run for public offices and to volunteer for committees. When the community sees an all white/all male/all older people board, it is easy to feel like your voice won't be heard and your needs won't be met.

I am very excited about learning and having input into county government. Thank you for this opportunity.