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Commissioners Review $186 Million in Water & Sewer Needs, Landfill Operations and Other County Issues

Anson County commissioners tackled a lengthy agenda during their Tuesday, November 17 meeting, with much of the discussion centered on the county's aging water and sewer infrastructure, how to pay for improvements and ways to reduce operating expenses. The meeting also included updates on landfill operations, a proposal to display historic American documents, concerns raised by residents and recognition of outgoing Commissioner Lawrence Gatewood.

Utilities Representatives of engineering firm Hazen and Sawyer presented findings from a grant-funded assessment of the county's water and wastewater systems. The study examined the condition of existing infrastructure, potential risks and future replacement needs. The county maintains approximately 500 miles of water distribution lines, 53 miles of sewer collection lines and nine wastewater pump stations.

Engineers explained that while much of the water system is considered relatively low-risk, some older pipes and major transmission lines need attention. They recommended prioritizing improvements according to the likelihood and consequences of failures rather than attempting to replace everything at once.

The county has identified approximately $186 million in capital improvements to be addressed over the next 10 years. Engineers emphasized that this figure represents prioritized projects, not the county's entire infrastructure needs.

Among the recommendations and findings:

- Replace selected aging water mains, including asbestos-cement lines and certain smaller PVC pipes.
- Use camera inspections to evaluate sewer lines and identify repairs that could cost substantially less than complete replacement.
- Establish a regular program to inspect and operate water system valves so sections can be isolated more quickly during emergencies.
- Continue evaluating wastewater force mains & maintaining accurate infrastructure maps.
- Pursue state grants and low-interest loans to help finance improvements.

Hazen and Sawyer engineer Brandon Garner reported that the county applied for approximately $35 million in wastewater funding, $25 million in drinking water funding and an additional $125,000 for asset inventory and assessment work during the fall funding cycle. Funding decisions are expected at the State Water Infrastructure Authority's December 9 meeting.

The county's financial condition could affect its ability to accept some awards, particularly loans requiring approval from the Local Government Commission. Garner explained that the county's water utility has an operating ratio of approximately 0.75, meaning operating revenue is insufficient to cover operating expenses. The sewer system's ratio is approximately 1.03, placing it near the break-even point.

Commissioners discussed the possibility of restructuring water rates to improve the county's financial position and strengthen future funding applications. Several commissioners emphasized that residents should not be expected to shoulder the entire burden through higher rates. They urged the county to identify operational savings before asking customers to pay more. One example involved water overflowing from a storage tank because pumping operations had not been adjusted appropriately. Commissioners were told that changes had been made and that the tank was no longer overflowing at the time of the meeting. Other previously addressed issues included replacement of a valve associated with substantial water loss and adjustments to water pressure.

County staff and engineers were asked to prepare a proposed water rate structure for consideration at the December 7 commissioners meeting.

Landfill Operations and Waste Collection Tyler Fitzgerald, district manager for Waste Connections, updated commissioners on operations at the Anson County landfill. Fitzgerald reported that the facility currently receives approximately 3,000 tons of waste daily, compared with 600 to 700 tons when Waste Connections acquired the operation. Its permit allows up to 6,000 tons per day.

The landfill has approximately 23 years of remaining capacity under its current permit. The company's franchise agreement with Anson County extends through 2040.

Several improvements are underway, including a system to remove PFAS chemicals, additional landfill cell construction and a pipeline connection that will allow gas recovered from the landfill to enter a natural gas pipeline.

Commissioners questioned Fitzgerald about odor complaints, environmental monitoring, the cleanliness of convenience sites and residents from outside Anson County using local trash collection facilities. Fitzgerald said the company monitors groundwater, surface water and air quality and investigates odor complaints. He said monitoring results had not indicated the environmental concerns raised during the discussion.

Commissioners also discussed whether requiring identification at convenience sites could help prevent nonresidents from disposing of trash without paying. Concerns were raised about the potential for confrontations and illegal dumping. No policy change was approved.

Charters of Freedom Proposal Jeff Morris, representing the nonprofit Foundation Forward, presented a proposal to establish a Charters of Freedom display in Anson County. The project would feature reproductions of the Declaration of Independence, United States Constitution and Bill of Rights in a permanent public setting. Morris said the organization has established displays in approximately 60 North Carolina counties and hopes eventually to reach all 100. Commissioners voted to explore the proposal, including possible locations, costs and responsibilities. The vote did not authorize construction or commit the county to an agreement.

Other Business and Board Actions Commissioners also addressed several additional matters:

- **Mobile home taxes:** The board approved tax releases and refunds associated with returning single-wide mobile home assessments to their 2025 tax-year values. Commissioner Mims was recused from the vote because of a conflict of interest.
- **Personnel:** Commissioners approved reclassifying a vacant human resources technician position from pay grade 61 to senior human resources technician at grade 64. Human Resources Manager Ingram said the change would not increase staffing or require additional budget funding. One commissioner opposed the motion.
- **Sheriff's bond:** The board approved the sheriff's bond presented for consideration.
- **Wastewater equipment:** Commissioners agreed to seek competitive bids for a wastewater pump replacement after receiving a quote of approximately $249,000. Other pumps remain operational, & the replacement was not considered an emergency.
- **Lilesville Post Office:** The board received an update on the closed post office. A determination was still pending on whether service would resume through a mobile unit or whether the closure would become permanent.
- **County audit:** The annual financial audit is expected to be presented at the December 7 meeting if completed in time. The deadline for submission is December 31.
- **Utility customer communications:** Commissioners discussed complaints about unanswered after-hours water emergency calls and suggested providing more timely public notices about outages and estimated restoration times.
- **Utilities director:** The county continues recruiting for a utilities director. The county manager reported contacting two qualified individuals about potentially serving on an interim basis.
- **Meeting calendar:** Approval of the proposed 2027 commissioners meeting schedule was postponed until December 7.

During public comments, residents also raised concerns about ongoing water system problems and property tax assessments, including the impact of increased valuations on owners of older single-wide mobile homes.

Commissioner Lawrence Gatewood Recognized The meeting concluded with recognition of Commissioner Lawrence Gatewood, who chose not to seek reelection after eight years on the board. Lula Jackson reviewed Gatewood's years of service to Anson County, including his earlier work in county government and his contributions as a commissioner. Gatewood was presented with a plaque honoring his eight years of dedicated service. He thanked county residents, employees and fellow commissioners for their support. The occasion included several humorous recollections from his years in public service, along with expressions of appreciation for his commitment to the county.

Commissioners and members of the audience were invited to enjoy refreshments following the meeting in his honor.

The next regular meeting of the Anson County Board of Commissioners is scheduled for Monday, December 7.

Five Things You Might Not Know

Here are five bits of trivia you may not have encountered before.

1) "Stewardesses" can be typed entirely with the left hand using conventional touch typing on a QWERTY keyboard. At 12 letters, it is commonly cited as one of the longest familiar English words that can be typed that way. So apparently the right hand can take a coffee break.

2) Golf balls generally have a few hundred dimples. A commonly cited number is 336, although there is no required standard and the actual number varies among manufacturers and models. Those little indentations aren't decorative. They affect airflow around the ball, reducing drag and helping create lift. A perfectly smooth golf ball wouldn't travel nearly as well, even if your swing gave you something else to blame.

3) Glass can remain in the environment for an extraordinarily long time. You've probably heard the claim that it takes a million years for glass to decompose. The reality is that glass does not biodegrade like organic material and can persist essentially indefinitely under normal environmental conditions. That's one very good reason to recycle it.

4) Gold doesn't rust. Rust is specifically iron oxide, so gold cannot rust in the usual sense. Gold is also exceptionally resistant to corrosion and oxidation, which helps explain why ancient gold objects can emerge from the ground thousands of years later looking remarkably good. If only everything aged that gracefully.

5) And finally, the tongue is often described as the only muscle attached at just one end. That's a popular bit of trivia, but it isn't quite anatomically accurate. The tongue is actually a complex muscular organ made up of several interconnected muscles, with attachments to structures including the hyoid bone and jaw.