

**HIGH POINT CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
WITH THE GUILFORD COUNTY LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION
FEBRUARY 5, 2015 – 7:00 P.M.
COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

MINUTES

Present:

Mayor William S. Bencini, Jr.; Mayor Pro Tem James Davis (Ward 5); and Council Members Cynthia Y. Davis (At-Large), Latimer Alexander (At-Large), Chris Williams (Ward 2), and Alyce Hill (Ward 3)

Absent:

Council Members Jeff Golden (Ward 1), Jay Wagner (Ward 4) and Jason Ewing (Ward 6)

Guilford County Delegation Present:

Senator Trudy Wade, Chair (District 27)
Senator Gladys A. Robinson (District 28)
Representative John Faircloth (District 61)
Representative Cecil Brockman (District 60)
Representative Ralph C. Johnson (District 58)

Staff Present:

Greg Demko, City Manager; JoAnne Carlyle, City Attorney; Lisa Vierling, City Clerk; Jeron Hollis, Communications Officer; Fred Baggett, City's Lobbyist

News Media Present:

John Hammer, The Rhino Times
Amanda Lehmert, Reporter- News & Record
Doug Clark, Editorial Writer- News & Record
Photographer- News & Record
Videographer- News & Record

The purpose of the meeting was for the High Point City Council and public to meet with the Guilford County Legislative Delegation. The following comments were made:

Mayor Bill Bencini spoke on behalf of the High Point City Council and addressed the following issues of concern:

1. *Loss of privilege tax authority, creating a revenue hole of \$700,000 for High Point and \$62 million statewide that will fall on the backs of property tax payers*
2. *Preservation of state budget support for the Furniture Market, currently \$1.8 million for promotion and transportation. According to a recent Duke University study, the Furniture Market generates economic activity in the amount of \$5.4 billion*

3. *Threatened change in sales tax distribution formula to reduce weight of point of sale and re-distribute revenue to rural counties. (High Point feels this is a bad idea and would rather see the focus on underdeveloped counties)*
4. *Restore Historic Properties Tax Exemption; High Point has a great number of reusable manufacturing and other properties that could benefit from this policy*
5. *Adequately fund state economic development incentive programs (biggest issue in High Point is the lack of jobs and type of jobs needed to replace the effects when the federal government changed the trade policy.*

Following his comments, Mayor Bencini introduced members of the High Point City Council that were present.

***Council Member Latimer Alexander** addressed the Legislators regarding sweepstakes and asked them to please give some clarity to the sweepstakes issue because there seems to be quite a bit of confusion.*

***Council Member Cynthia Davis** addressed the delegation regarding public concerns for parents throughout High Point and shared a personal story of how her daughter was assaulted at the age of 14 at Central High School and the impact that the incident had on her family. She pleaded for the Legislators to look at the guidelines for the age of accountability and guidelines for emancipation.*

***Jim Armstrong**, a High Point resident, expressed strong opposition to Senator Wade's Senate Bill 36 that was just filed on February 4th regarding changing the composition of the Greensboro City Council by redistricting and asked her to reconsider her bill. He also asked them to support Rep. Hardison, Rep. Pricey Harrison and Rep. Ralph Johnson in their quest for redistricting reform and thanked the Legislative Delegation for their continued support for the High Point Furniture Market.*

***Jason Evans**, on behalf of the High Point Regional Association of Realtors (HPRAR), asked for their support regarding the following issues:*

- *Reoccurring funding for housing trust funds and non-commercial underground storage funds*
- *Workforce Housing One Program*
- *Tax Policy that encourages economic development including the Historic Preservation Tax Credit*
- *Real Estate Transfer Tax*
- *Protecting the investment of private property mortgage interest deduction and property tax deduction through preservation of the tax code that does not penalize private property owners through real estate transfer fees, etc....*

***Rev. Julie Peebles** from Greensboro, addressed the delegation regarding the following issues she felt were critical:*

- *Expansion of Medicaid*
- *Public Schools*
- *Feels like the City of Greensboro is under attack regarding the bill Senator Wade has proposed and felt the bill is wrong, unfair and unethical. She asked the Legislature not to pursue this bill.*

Sylvia Samet, a High Point resident, addressed the delegation in opposition to Senate Bill 36.

Willie Taylor from Greensboro spoke to the delegation on behalf of the League of Women Voters for the Piedmont Triad. She spoke in opposition to Senate Bill 36 (re: redistricting in Greensboro and change in representation on the Greensboro City Council). She requested the delegation not to leave the people out of the decision-making process and asked that it be put to a referendum for the voters to decide.

Ms. Wilburn from Greensboro shared her concerns with the proposed legislation regarding education in general and asked the legislators not to continue drowning public education, but save it.

Beverly Bard spoke in opposition of Senate Bill 36 and asked the delegation to keep the composition of the Greensboro City Council as it is. She felt they do have great representation on the Greensboro City Council and believed that any reductions would result in a loss of diversity and votes.

Rev. Beth McKee-Huger, 408 Woodlawn Avenue, Greensboro, addressed the delegation on the following issues:

1. *Critical need for Medicaid expansion*
2. *Housing Trust Fund*
3. *Opposition to Senate Bill 36 (felt the Greensboro City Council should remain as it is)*

Skip Alston, 2705 West Vandalia Road in Greensboro, addressed the delegation in support of Senate Bill 36. He was not sure if the intent of the bill was to increase the political capacity of the Africa-American community, but felt the bill does accomplish this because it would result in three African-American districts and two influence districts. He felt this bill would give fair representation to the Greensboro City Council.

Dot Kearns, a former Guilford County Board of Education member, addressed the Legislators on the critical importance of stewardship of public buildings. She explained due to changes and drastic cuts in operational funding, this creates a hardship for the schools because of the number of buildings and student increased. She asked the Legislators to look at whatever mechanism might be necessary to improving this.

There being no further comments, Senator Wade thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and gave the Legislators an opportunity to make closing remarks.

Representative Ralph Johnson: *I want to thank everybody for coming out tonight. We do have some major issues. As you know, the Governor spoke last night and outlined his agenda in terms of what he plans to do. Some I agree with and some I don't agree with. Let's talk about the ones I don't agree with. I don't agree that we need to borrow \$1.3 billion for transportation and infrastructure when we deny Medicaid. It just seems to me that we are putting our citizens further in debt in terms of trying to do the right thing. There are so many citizens that are denied Medicaid coverage and I've been a strong supporter of that. With that said, the historic cut, earned income tax credit...I didn't hear enough to really feel good about where we're going, but what I will say is this...it's going to be a very interesting long session because all over the State of North Carolina we're hurting. Until we come to that realization that we need to do something different, it's going to continue. Ms. Kearns, as you mentioned about the buildings and the need for repairs...there was something said about that, but how are we going to pay for it? That's the thing. Are we going to borrow our way out of this? At the end of the day, as Legislators, we are going to have to make decisions that are going to benefit North Carolina. Hopefully between the Senate and the House, we can make those things happen. So, again, I thank you for coming out tonight.*

Representative Cecil Brockman: *I don't have much to say. I really want to thank the Mayor, City Council members for what they had to say and the members in the community who came out who have expressed concerns. One thing that I care a lot about and I think we all read this in the paper about High Point being Number 2 in hunger. As a community I think that's something that we really need to take a serious look at. 27260, which I think is the zip code that me and Senator Robinson represent, is one of the poorest in the State. So as much as I think this delegation can try to help out with that issue, I think that would be a really good thing.*

Senator Gladys Robinson: *Well, it's certainly always my pleasure to see all of you, both High Point and Greensboro, and a lot of Greensboro folks have come over too. But just as I said to the Mayor and to the others, High Point has been a concern. I've been here as a non-profit for over 25 years and he says he's going to visit my office soon, so I'm going to take him up on it. Just like Representative Brockman said, we sit very close to some of the most impoverished areas and as John and I have discussed before, too, when we look at what will help to raise the top is raising the bottom. And that's education and jobs and that's so important. As we look at those schools that Representative Brockman is talking about and where they are in High Point is so important that we have support for those schools in terms of teachers and assistants and all of those other things—even social workers is what I'm advocating because teachers can't do it all. So we need to pull that bottom up and support the teachers, support the schools, support the neighborhoods as we talk about jobs. In Greensboro and High Point, the Southeastern Greensboro, Southside High Point in the inner city is where we need people trained and need new jobs. We need to have jobs and we need people trained so that they have an opportunity to have a quality of life like everybody else and that's so important to me. So, Human Service issues are always important to me. Mental Health....John and I went to the Mental Health*

Association's meeting here in High Point the other week and we heard cries from people about not being able to get mental health care because they fall in that gap between affordable healthcare and Medicaid and that's a Medicaid expansion piece. That's a critical mass of 300,000 or more people who need healthcare, who need mental health counseling. We need those kinds of services. We have to figure out a way to do it. We just have to. We cannot afford in North Carolina to leave that many people, our folks, without healthcare and going to emergency rooms at High Point Regional and then it costs more money. You get the bill for it because you get it in your insurance premiums. So we are hopefully working towards something and we're going to work hard on it. I propose an Arkansas plan and some other plans in terms of looking at how the state will not have to pay us much money in terms of the administrative cost, but still give people the opportunity for healthcare. So education and healthcare are very critical issues to me. Your issues are my issues too, Dot, in terms of school buildings. I remember the bond that we worked on years ago for all of Guilford County because what we saw is that Greensboro was able to build schools, but High Point wasn't. It was a different system. Even in Guilford County, so a different tax structure, but we did a bond for all of those. Now those schools need to be repaired and other schools need to be built all across Guilford County and I heard the Superintendent say they are coming forth with a total bond. So we appreciate that. We appreciate all that you are doing to address the issues. You know where I am. I'm not going to talk about Senator Wade's bill today. That's her bill and you know what I feel in terms of those issues and we can talk about it in Greensboro, of course. But it's legislation that has been filed and hopefully it will change several times before anything happens. But your concerns are my concerns and that's why I represent you in Raleigh and I invite you. I have cards up here. I invite you to contact me at any time. Thank you so much for allowing us to be here.

Representative John Faircloth: *Well it's good to be sitting behind this particular dais. I sat here for a good while a few years back with some of the same council members that are still here. A lot of good memories and I've got my picture on the wall back there in some place. So I'm history now. But I want to make a few comments. First of all, about how thankful I am to see people from Greensboro who could find High Point. [laughter] And who come over and join us with what we do in High Point. We're a vibrant city, with a vibrant business climate. We're trying to make some improvements here. This Council is doing a wonderful job. The volunteers in the city who are working on these projects....sure they bump heads once in a while, but that's the way the system works. We're pushing forward as one of the major cities of the State in an unusual situation because in Guilford County, we have two large municipalities which is all but completely unique to North Carolina. Well, maybe down in Cary now there may be a comparison there. But at any rate, it makes us a little different. I find when you were talking about legislation, it makes us a little different from other parts in the State. Where the other large municipalities are, they are surrounded by a lot of suburban and rural area. We are two municipalities here. So it makes us, as I said, relatively unique and gives us some problems as we start looking at legislation that might apply well in other places, but might not quite fit because of our situation here.*

I would also like to remind everyone....I think someone mentioned a child who was asking about why you would vote...who made that comment? Yes Ma'am, thank you. I would like for all of us to encourage our young people to take more interest in government so they can find out how it operates. We have pages that come down every week and take part in our meetings down there in the House and the Senate and these pages at the end of the week, if you go up and ask them how did you enjoy your week and did you learn anything. Invariably they'll say it's different from what I thought. Now I don't know if that's in a good way or a bad way, but they were impressed in one way or another in that week. But there's also ways that children can learn

about their government at home. Many of our committee meetings and our meetings in the Chambers are on TV and are recorded. You can have your child tune in and listen or look. Last night the Governor was on TV and we were sitting there smiling very broadly trying to look nice. So there's ways to connect your children to the General Assembly and I would like to see more connection. I don't see as much of the young folks there as I would like. So I would encourage that participation.

I also want to comment if I can, a lot was said about bills tonight and how you feel about bills and so forth. The process, the process that this information goes through to become a bill first of all and then to become law long after that, gives an awful lot of chance for people to have input. The committees spend a lot of time listening to citizens and listening to those in State government who part of the staff that can help us make decisions. I would encourage you, as you have a bill, or information that you think is going to become a bill, follow it. Watch what's happening to it. Make your comments. We've all got email. We've all got telephones. We need to know what you think about matters. I put a bill in myself today and when I handed it to the lady I said I wonder what it will look like at the end of the next three months. I hope it remains sort of like it is, but it very well could change and a lot of that change happens because somebody back home went to their Legislator and said either I want you to add this to that to make it better or I want you to get rid of it to make it better. However you may feel, get involved in the process and let us know what you think about matters. I think the system works better for everybody when we work together on these ideas. Some of the things we talked about tonight, we're going to all be revisiting several times I suspect. The news at the end of July or so might be quite different from what you are reading today. Thank you very much for coming.

Senator Trudy Wade: *I thank all of you for being here and bringing forth your concerns and we've gotten a lot of information tonight and we certainly want to continue the dialogue. Don't be a stranger. We all have people that help us at the General Assembly. If we don't happen to be in the office at that time or are in a committee meeting. I want to introduce my legislative assistant tonight that came, Cathy Hartsell. So if you call my office you'll get Cathy. If you need any information, feel free to call Cathy and she'll let me know if I need to give you a call. Tonight I'm sure she has some of our cards with her. If you have any other concerns tonight that you want to list with Cathy that would be great or see me afterwards. That would be wonderful. So thank you, again, for coming. We thank the people from Greensboro that came over here, too. We love to see more people. Sometimes it's only two or three people, so we appreciate you coming and hope to see you in Greensboro. Thank you very much. [applause]*

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

William S. Bencini, Jr., Mayor

Attest:

Lisa B. Vierling, MMC
City Clerk