

**IREDELL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 25, 2005**

The Iredell County Board of Commissioners met for a Special Meeting on Tuesday, January 25, 2005, at 7:00 p.m., in the Iredell County Government Center (Commissioners' Meeting Room), 200 South Center Street, Statesville, NC.

Present were:

Chairman Sara Haire Tice  
Vice Chairman Godfrey Williams  
Steve D. Johnson  
Marvin Norman  
Ken Robertson

Staff present: County Manager Joel Mashburn, County Attorney Bill Pope, Finance Director Susan Blumenstein, and Clerk to the Board Jean Moore.

**CALL TO ORDER** by Chairman Tice.

**INVOCATION** by Commissioner Robertson.

Chairman Tice declared the meeting to be in a public hearing.

(Approximately 75 – 100 people attended the meeting.)

**REQUEST FROM THE FORT DOBBS ALLIANCE FOR A \$45,000 DONATION  
TO BE USED FOR AN OPTION ON 16 ACRES OF PROPERTY**

Chandler Bryan (proponent), the Chairman of the Fort Dobbs Alliance, gave a brief overview of the French & Indian War. He said Fort Dobbs was an important site during the war, and the Alliance wanted to purchase seven adjacent lots (lot #s 24 through 28 along with 33 & 34 towards the back of the property) or 16 acres. He said a property option had been obtained; however, it was dependent upon a \$400,000 grant from the state. Bryan said that if the grant wasn't awarded, Chuck Nantz, the owner of the property had been approached about the Alliance just purchasing lots 33 & 34 for a buffer or green space to protect the site. He asked for the public discussion to be limited solely to the "green space" (lots 33 & 34), and he said there were no plans to erect any buildings on this property. Brian said there was an urgency in the \$45,000 request, due to the grant application needing to be in Raleigh by January 28, 2005. He said that since the owner was willing to limit the transaction to only the two lots, if necessary, the \$45,000 would not be lost.

Steve Tate (opponent): Mentioned he had lived in the Fort Dobbs area for about 20 years, and he didn't think a traffic study had been developed for the project. He said the Fort Dobbs property deed from the Hatchett family to the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) contained a revert clause stipulating that if the property happened to be removed from the DAR organization, it would revert to the Hatchett heirs.

Micki Earp (proponent): Mentioned she lived out of the county, but she taught at Scotts School. She then introduced two of her students who made the following remarks:

Cassidy Eudy said she represented the student body at Scotts Elementary School. She said the students thought the fort should be developed to its fullest and brought to a more historic and accurate condition.

Rose Bonnano, another student of Mrs. Earp, said she felt the land held archaeological evidence. She said it would be sad if a housing development were built upon the land.

Kathleen Hatchett (opponent): Mentioned she supported the preservation of Fort Dobbs, but added that there were different kinds of support. She said that if the request were approved, the money would flow to the Alliance, and then to the state. Hatchett said the subsequent decisions about the fort would then be made by the state. She said the State of North Carolina acquired the land over 30 years ago, and it was the State of North Carolina that decided not to develop the site. Hatchett said that as a matter of fact, the state tried to give away the site in 1981, and later, it was completely closed. Mrs. Hatchett said the state officials had now hired Beth Carter, the site manager, to promote their interests. Hatchett said the Fort Dobbs DAR had given the land to the state with the understanding that an actual fort would be built, but this never happened. She said a residential development would fit better in the area than a commercial enterprise. Hatchett said the Alliance members wanted more land for green space, and the reason was due to their plans to build on the current green space. Mrs. Hatchett said that if the land were purchased and no artifacts were found, she questioned what purpose it would have. She said parking perhaps. Mrs. Hatchett said the state's projections on the number of potential visitors to the site were between 100,000 to 200,000. She said this was unacceptable to the current residents. Mrs. Hatchett said camp re-enactors who used the site spent their nights in tents and brought their own food. She questioned how any economic benefits could be obtained. She said there were no blueprints or plans on what the Alliance's "Frontier Village" would look like. She said there were also no true cost estimates. Mrs. Hatchett said she (1) didn't trust the state to fund the operation, (2) didn't trust the state to be reliable in the development of the project, and (3) didn't trust the state to deal fairly with the neighbors and the community. She said, "The state needs to step up and show a commitment that hasn't occurred in 30 plus years."

Emily Ervin: Mentioned she was a member of the Fort Dobbs DAR, and it was difficult for her to imagine the number of people visiting the site that had been suggested. She encouraged careful thought on both sides of the project.

Louanne Watts (opponent): Mentioned she and the others in opposition were not against history, or the fort, but they wanted to keep the site small and rural. She said, "Preservation is saving it as it is, saving it as it should be -- not commercialization." She said the Alliance could improve on what already existed. Watts said that when responsible people reviewed their budgets, they looked at their "needs" and their "wants and wishes." She said Fort Dobbs was a "want and wish," and the county had "needs."

Robert Remsburg (proponent): Mentioned he was the North Carolina Historic Site Western Section Leader. He said Fort Dobbs was the only French and Indian War site in the Carolinas. Remsburg said that by preserving the site, the county was helping to lay the groundwork for future economic development, and this would mean jobs for Iredell County citizens. He said the grant would provide a buffer for the proposed reconstructed fort and the residential area on Fort Dobbs Road. Remsburg said that once the fort had "costumed interpreters," it would attract many visitors. He said many plans needed to be made, but the future looked promising. Remsburg said many businesses would experience a significant increase in revenues due to the site. He said a local investment would be a continuation of the county's practice of providing incentive packages for industry. He said the state was cataloguing the site's artifacts, and this would help provide the documentation for an accurate portrayal of the 250-year-old fort. Remsburg said that from his experience, historical sites did not produce traffic problems. He said the total amount of added cars on the road would not exceed 160 vehicles a day. In addition, he said tourism was basically a "green industry," so there was not much of an environmental impact. He said the grant along with the county's investment would be a win-win situation, and it was an incentive package worth funding.

Commissioner Robertson asked if the state built projects without local support.

Remsburg said any building plans would have to fit the zoning regulations of the county. He said the archaeological evidence was still being researched, and it was difficult to know what was actually on the site. Remsburg said he couldn't assure anyone that the proposed property would never be built upon. He said a visitor's center was being proposed, but it would probably be located on the side where the existing parking area was located.

Robertson asked if the Alliance would have approval authority on any future plans.

Remsburg said most every historic site being maintained by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources had a support group. He said the support group members generally had an opportunity to provide input, especially if their funds were being used. Remsburg said also the local state legislators would have some impact on how the funds were used.

Robertson asked what would happen if the Alliance opposed some of the state's plans.

Remsburg said an example of a good working relationship was with the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Support Group in Asheville, NC. He said the group worked closely with the state in providing funds for the restoration of the house's artifacts following a fire. Remsburg said the state and the insurance company provided the money for the restoration of the house.

Robertson said many citizens had asked why Fort Dobbs' funding had been cut if the state felt it had importance. He said Kay Williams, the Director of the North Carolina Division of State Cultural sites had said that prior to 2003, there was one full-time employee and one part-time employee. Robertson continued by saying Ms. Williams said the full-time person retired, and the part-time person took a medical disability. He said, then, the site discontinued operations. Robertson said the full-time position was continued, but the duties changed from keeping the site open eight hours-a-day to the actual development of the site.

Remsburg said another reason was due to a loss of funds that the state was experiencing. He said the state's budget was cut in many ways. Remsburg said the Fort Dobbs Alliance was later established, and the state began to review the site's potential.

Commissioner Williams asked if the state would still be interested in the site if the additional property weren't purchased.

Remsburg said he couldn't speak for his supervisors, but the site was important.

Commissioner Williams said that during the Bicentennial Celebration, when diggings occurred at the site and there was a proposed amphitheater, the community became interested and even excited about the fort. He asked why the state didn't take an active role at that time.

Remsburg said his information was second-hand, but he understood there were "politics" involved.

Commissioner Johnson asked the likelihood that the state would fund the project.

Remsburg said it was one of the "top five priorities." He said there were 27 different sites and they were all poorly funded. Remsburg said hope for the fort's development relied both on the Alliance and the state legislature. He added, however, the state's historic site budget did not provide for the funds to develop a new site. He said the only way the project would occur would be through an appropriation out of the state legislature. He said what was needed was a legislative bill, and "a couple of good years." He said he didn't feel it would be funded during this year.

Commissioner Johnson asked the typical size of a historical site.

Remsburg said they varied from the smallest being two lots (Thomas Wolfe house) on up to 800 acres.

Buddy Hemric (undecided): Mentioned there were several unanswered questions about the proposed project, and he encouraged the commissioners to seek answers before approving the \$45,000 request.

Harry W. Watt (proponent): Mentioned he was a past president of the Genealogical Society for Iredell County, and he was currently the president of the Vance House Museum. He encouraged any efforts that could be made to help support local family history and the fort.

Steve Isaac (opponent): Mentioned tax dollars were shrinking due to unemployment and business closings, and that non-profit organizations were being required to fill in more gaps left by cutbacks in government services. He mentioned that social problems were increasing in the communities and schools, and it wasn't prudent to fund the request. He said buying more land to protect an area already set aside and preserved from development was only allowing the Fort Dobbs representatives "a foot in the door" to seek additional funding in the future. Isaac said he cared about the communities, the schools, the underprivileged, the physically and emotionally challenged citizens, and the county's children. He said the United Way, and its affiliated agencies, were constantly struggling to provide the most basic of services. Isaac suggested that the county's money and attention be turned to projects that improved the citizens' quality of life, and helped those needing help, along with preserving vital services that were now "teetering on bankruptcy."

David Collins (proponent): Mentioned he was a resident of Fort Dobbs Farms, and he supported the efforts of the Alliance to purchase the property. He encouraged the commissioners to approve the request.

David Parker (proponent): Mentioned that for 250 years the area around the fort had experienced no residential development, but now, there was a possibility this might change. He said the fort had educational value, and the school children didn't have enough "hands on" local sites that showed how men and women sacrificed their lives and gambled on their futures in creating Iredell County and the nation. Parker said Fort Dobbs symbolized all of these things. He said the county could be creative in approving the request -- it didn't have to write a blank check. Parker said there was one "shot" to buffer the fort, and the neighbors should consider the buffer as a benefit to them.

Roy West (proponent): Mentioned he was concerned about the history of the fort site. He said the fort was an asset, and the county was needed to help send a message to the state that there was local support for the project.

Elaine Steele (proponent): Mentioned there was only one Fort Dobbs, and it needed to be made "whole." She said it needed to be strengthened and expanded.

Lislott Harberts (proponent): Mentioned she was for the preservation of the fort, but there were other projects needing money. She challenged the commissioners to look into the future, especially due to the land being potentially lost to a residential development.

O.C. Stonestreet III (proponent): Mentioned there could never be enough money for all the "good things that could be done." He said the \$45,000.00, if used for the project, would pay dividends in the future. Stonestreet, a former North Carolina State History teacher, said he felt that if Fort Dobbs were built out, the site would provide an economic stimulus for the county. He asked if some mechanism could be put in place stating the county would get the money back, if the project didn't work out. Stonestreet said the Fort Dobbs request was an opportunity that needed to be accepted.

Lewis Alexander (proponent): Mentioned he was the Chairman of the Iredell County Historic Properties Commission, and the Fort Dobbs site was the first county designated historic site. Alexander said that for any construction to occur, due to this designation, the building plans would have to be approved by the historic properties commission. Mr. Alexander said he was also a member of the Alliance board, and he wanted the commissioners to focus on the future. He said an affirmative vote would send a clear message to the state representatives, to the Department of Cultural Resources, and to the State Historical Commission that it wasn't just the Alliance members who supported the fort's reconstruction. Alexander said in the past, there was not any indication on what the fort may have looked like, but now, due to research, a set of working plans could be created depicting what the fort resembled in December of 1776.

Charlene Isaac asked, assuming the request were approved, how the citizens could become involved (a fundraising campaign or drive) in putting the \$45,000 back into the community.

Commissioner Robertson said there was a timing problem.

Mrs. Isaac said this was understood, but she meant the campaign could occur later.

No one else desired to speak, and Chairman Tice adjourned the hearing.

Commissioner Williams said he had received more phone calls and e-mails on the Fort Dobbs request than what he had experienced in the new library facility debate. He said the people in opposition were primarily the ones who had contacted him. Williams said he was the first commissioner to have a cub scout day camp at Fort Dobbs, and he had many other connections to the site. Mr. Williams said he had many questions about the project, especially in regards to traffic and the number of visitors who might visit the site. He said commercial projects had to be presented to the county's planning board prior to a vote by the commissioners, and that while he understood the Fort Dobbs project was not of this type, it had the same affect on the community.

Commissioner Robertson asked what the debate would look like had the county owned the land and planned to sell it for residential purposes. Robertson said he felt sure the residents would want the county to keep the land as a part of Fort Dobbs. He said the most sincere argument against the project was the potential traffic problem, but things change. Robertson said that if the primary issue with the residents was over the money, he questioned where they were two weeks ago when the board approved a \$1.2 million Statesville Airport request. He said the land was believed to contain artifacts, and the Alliance wanted to protect the site by buying it. He said the state would refrain from spending money on the project if the Iredell County commissioners were not supportive. Robertson said Sullivan's Island had Fort Moultrie, Charleston had Fort Sumter, Savannah had Fort Pulaski, and Iredell County had Fort Dobbs. He said it was important to utilize the \$45,000 towards a buffer for the site.

**MOTION** by Commissioner Robertson to provide the \$45,000 for the Alliance to use on an option for the 16 acres of property.

Commissioner Johnson said Fort Dobbs had 31 acres, and this was larger than many historic sites in the state. He said according to his information, the original fort structure was only a few thousand square feet in size. Johnson said that if the project were only for historical purposes -- not commercial -- the fort could be reconstructed adequately on the existing acreage. He said that during the past four years, the county had experienced budgetary problems. Mr. Johnson said last year's budget was particularly difficult due to private property leaving the county when industries closed. He said also that personal property tax revenues were flat. Johnson said one example of the budget difficulties was with the rescue squads. He said the squads didn't get an

increase due to the county not being in a position to provide one. Johnson said later, a portion of the increase was restored, but the point he was trying to make was that it wasn't fair to tell one agency something and then turn around and give \$45,000 to a project due to the state being negligent. Johnson said the State of North Carolina had so far been absent in the legal transactions with the property owner (Nantz).

Commissioner Norman thanked the Alliance representatives and the people attending the meeting for their interest in the project. He said, however, that several people had voiced objections to the expenditure, and they felt the money could be best spent on classroom construction. Mr. Norman said he, too, felt the money could be better spent, for example, the rescue squads, the schools, or the sheriff's department.

Commissioner Williams said many citizens had telephoned him about the request. He also mentioned the budgetary constraints during the past four years, and said the state had a tendency to withhold money from the county. Mr. Williams said he wanted to point this out due to the Alliance pursuing a grant from the state. He said Mitchell Community College was currently being faced with a reversion of \$60,000 to the state. Williams said many people in the Fort Dobbs area were unaware of project's magnitude, and he stressed the importance for the Alliance to gain the community's support.

VOTING: Ayes – 2 (Robertson/Tice); Nays – 3 (Johnson/Norman/Williams).

**ADJOURNMENT:** MOTION by Chairman Tice to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

VOTING: Ayes – 5; Nays – 0.

Approval: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk to the Board