



Section 11

W. Lee Smith

*Sarasota City Manager
Candidate Report*

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Cover Letter and Resume

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29 Lake Shore Blvd.
Port Wentworth, Georgia 31407
Phone: 912-328-9492
Email: wlsmanager@outlook.com

February 6, 2025

City of Sarasota, Florida
Mayor, Liz Alpert
1565 1st Street, Room 101
Sarasota, FL 34236

Re: Sarasota, Fl. City Manager Position

Mayor Alpert,

I am writing to express my interest in the Sarasota City Manager position as shown on the recruitment firm's website. My (35+) thirty-five plus years of solid experience in North Carolina and Georgia local governments, coupled with my passion for local government operations, clearly align with every aspect of Nome's services and operations. These services include finance, public works, emergency management, sanitation, recreation, community involvement, comprehensive planning, zoning, water, sewer, drainage, capital construction management, environmental reviews and public involvement.

As my resume demonstrates, I have been developing my skills as a local government manager over the past thirty-five years. My management and public skills are outstanding, as are my abilities to bring communities together. I have also demonstrated proficiency in Management, receiving my ICMA Credentialed Manager status years ago. I have developed and implemented 911/communication systems, major capital projects including but not limited to: roads, bridges, water, sewer, broadband, multi-purpose stadium, etc. All within or under budget. Have successfully developed a team concept for employees several times successfully. Have major experience managing emergency events such as major storms, fires and chemical spills with pre-planning and post event management. It would be my pleasure to contribute comparable results to the City of Sarasota.

I was born and raised on the Coastal Outer Banks of North Carolina of which 12 years were living on Ocracoke Island and have spent my career as manager of several coastal local governments in North Carolina and Georgia. Living and working on the coast, I am well versed in:

- *shoreline stabilization*
- *storm readiness and operations*
- *water resources*
- *historic preservation*
- *coastal traditions*
- *community heritage and history*
- *wildlife protection*
- *recreation & tourism*

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These items together secured the Atlantic Coastal Communities while maintaining navigable waters and expanding economic opportunities for commerce and jobs. These experiences along with my operations and finance skills over 35+ years will support Sarasota's economic opportunities, long-term planning, and financial stabilization.

I am very excited about the chance to join the Sarasota team and look forward to discussing the opportunities Sarasota has to offer. I would be honored to be considered as your next City Manager and am prepared to meet with you and the council at your convenience. Lastly, I have traveled to Sarasota and the surrounding areas many times enjoying hiking, camping, kayaking and fishing and meeting awesome warm people. My last trip was in 2024. Again, thank you for this opportunity.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lee Smith".

William "Lee" Smith, III

WILLIAM "LEE" SMITH, III

29 Lake Shore Blvd., Port Wentworth GA 31407
912-328-9492 • wlsmanager@outlook.com

Career Statement

"I am an innovative leader with over 35 years of local government experience who enjoys creative problem solving while applying innovative management techniques to improve communities and their residents' quality of life while leaving a place much better than I found it."

EXPERIENCE**County Manager**

May 2014 to September 2022

Chatham County, Savannah, GA

Served a nine-member elected board, in a coastal community of approximately 300,000 people and a region of over 500,000 people with an annual growth rate of 17%.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- 2,250+ employees and a budget of \$998 million.
- Developed of a "zero based" budget process,
- Recommended local policy and laws for the Board to consider and carried out and implemented these activities per the Board's priorities and direction.
- Developed a professional executive team to manage the day to day operations of public works, law enforcement, building/safety, code enforcement, police, emergency management, judiciary, finance, parks and recreation, utilities, etc.

Achievements

- Established a new county 130 officer police department with the mindset of "real" community policing within 6 months.
- Successfully consolidated communications/E-911 system that had operated individually under seven municipalities to one system.
- Managed several successful financial referendums for projects such as infrastructure, new trial courthouse, new state of the art emergency operations center and multiple major recreation facilities.
- Initiated a strategic planning process involving several thousand citizens which brought forth the "Chatham County Blueprint for the Future." The Blueprint has been adopted by all local governments in the area.
- Stabilized the finances of the County which lead to a higher bond rating reducing financing costs of major capital projects.
- Managed the development of the Chatham County SPLOST (Special Local Option Sales Tax) of \$400 million for roads, recreation, capital, and infrastructure. Several of the projects are now under construction or completed, such as the new County Court Building, Marine Science Center, 3000 person multipurpose stadium, beach renourishment and several coastal trails and walkways. All finished on time and under budget.
- major successful emergency pre and post hurricane and storm operations.

County Manager/Chief Executive Officer

December 2001 to February 2014

Wayne County, Goldsboro, NC

Served a seven-member elected board, in a coastal plain community of approximately 130,000 people and a region consisting of a large military presence, agriculture and manufacturing.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- 1200 employees and a budget of \$175 million.
- Developed of a "zero based" budget process,
- Recommended local policy and laws for the Board to consider. Conducted and implemented these activities per the Board's priorities and direction.
- Developed a professional executive team to manage the day to day operations of public works, law enforcement, building/safety, code enforcement, police, emergency management, judiciary, finance, parks and recreation, water, sewer, utilities, etc.

Achievement

- Operations included: health and human services, finance, tax, emergency services, solid waste, sewer, law enforcement, etc.
- Construction and renovations of the county detention center and County Courthouse \$2.2 million.
- Developed the county's first 10 year capital improvement plan and budget.
- Creation of a public-private economic development agency recruiting over 2000 jobs in five years.
- Redevelopment of the county airport to an executive jetport, recruiting several corporate jets and new hangers with an increase in fuel sales of 86% and new tax base of \$367 million.
- Managed the development of a county-wide 800 MHz digital communication system including all county operations and law enforcement, EMS, Fire and all municipalities.
- Implemented a new county-wide emergency medical system, 24-hour paramedics from a volunteer system at a cost reduction to taxpayers including a state-of-the-art "Next Generation" E911 system. The new 911 system and EMS operational costs were reduced by \$1.2 million annually while maintaining a higher level of service.

County Manager

July 1993 to November 2001

Washington County, Plymouth, NC

Served a five-member elected board along the Outer Banks community of approximately 12,000.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- 112+ employees and a budget of \$12 million.
- Developed a "zero based" budget process generating ability to fund reserves and reduce the tax rate 6% for citizens.
- Recommended local policy and laws for the Board to consider and carried out and implemented the activities, services and programs per the Board's priorities and direction.
- Managed the day to day operations of public works, law enforcement, building/safety, code enforcement, police, emergency management, judiciary, finance, parks and recreation, utilities, etc.

Achievements

- Restructured the county water system to become a self-supporting enterprise through the expansion of the system to 3 municipalities.
- Implementation of the first Comprehensive Land Use and Zoning Plan and Ordinance. Endorsed by the military, industry, citizens and the environmental community and organizations.
- Construction of a river walkway on the Roanoke River \$1.1 million (grants) and construction of a full scale of the Historic River Lighthouse \$2.6 million (grants).
- Served as County Manager/County Hospital Administrator due to hospital finance negligence. Within one year we were able to stabilize hospital costs, improve operations and made a profit for the first time in 10 years.
- Development of the first County shuttle service (State and Federal funded)

Executive Director

December 1990 to June 1993

Columbus County Economic Development Commission, Whiteville, NC

Served a 13 member board Commission consisting of local governments and private industry.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Development of Commission budget \$1.5 million.
- Monthly Board meetings, community presentations and client finance packages.
- Responsible for the recruitment and retention of all industry in the county as well as the development and oversight of an 1100-acre industrial park.
- Marketing for the county/city.
- Responsible for the development, maintenance, and marketing of the industrial park with all infrastructure including water, sewer, gas, rail, and interstate connection.

Achievements

- Created over 1,600 new jobs and over \$926 million in new tax base.
- Manage a water and sewer bond referendum (successful) and project implementation. \$15 million
- Member of the NC Commerce Department Recruitment Team, covering Europe and Canada.
- Created a 1,100 acre industrial park adjacent to a major industry and college.
- Several public and private grants totaling over \$41 million.

Planner/Emergency Manager/Deputy Manager

March 1986 to November 1990

Pamlico County, Bayboro, NC

Duties and Responsibilities

- This position was responsible for: all emergency response (fire and rescue), preparedness, developed and implemented the county's first 911 system, community development including federal housing programs, tourism, zoning, mapping, etc.

Achievements

- Developed first 911 system in Eastern North Carolina
- Digitally mapped the County as a partner of the State of NC
- Recruited 6 new industries and 1150 jobs.
- Certified as an Emergency Manager.
- Certified as an arson investigator.
- Eleven successful pre and post hurricane operations.

EDUCATION

University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Wilmington, NC

1985 Bachelor of Science Business Administration (Cameron School of Business)

INTERESTS

- Transportation - Involved in the development of a Highway 70 Corridor Commission to oversee the strategic corridor interstate project involving all Eastern North Carolina including seven counties and 22 towns and cities. The \$1.2 billion project was completed in 2015.
- Infrastructure - Heavily involved in regional water and sewer projects (infrastructure Summit 2008), etc.
- Military - involved in the Military Affairs Commission and Seymour Support Council for Seymour Johnson Air Force Base.
- Affordable Housing – have volunteered and worked with Habitat for Humanity for over 20 years.
- Environment – My daughter and I volunteer with wildlife groups and have participated and volunteered in sea turtle preservation in North Carolina, Georgia, and Hawaii.
- Personal Time - The bulk of my time outside of the office is spent with my family and traveling. Recently completed my desire to visit, camp and hike all 50 states.

DISTINCTIONS

- County Manager of the Year for the Eastern Region in 2005
- Awarded Transportation Leadership Award in 2006.
- Certified/Accredited County Manager through ICMA since 2004.
- Chairperson and Board member of the Year in 2012 by the North Carolina Mental Health Council.
- Received 30-year recognition as a member of ICMA.
- Manager of the Year 1999 by the Eastern NC Regional Commission.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Developed the Chatham County "Calling All Manager's Group" including all local county city and county managers in the region of southeast Georgia and South Carolina.
- Previously an active member of the North Carolina City/County Manager's Association and ICMA and continue these activities in Georgia. Have served on several committees for the Georgia and North Carolina Association of County Commissioners including the NCPTS,

Curriculum development and Productivity Awards Committee.

- Serve as the local Wayne County Development Alliance as Secretary/Treasurer, Wayne County Chamber Board of Directors, Downtown Goldsboro Development Commission, Wayne County Partnership for Children, Past Board of Director member of the Wayne County United Way. Chair of Eastpointe Mental Health MCO and Chairperson of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Mental Health Waiver Advisory Committee. Member/Secretary/Treasurer of the Highway 70 Corridor Commission. Have continued as a major advocate of mental health in the State of Georgia.

SALARY HISTORY

- Chatham County - \$253,500 plus \$1200 car allowance per month all insurances paid by the county including family benefits, 401k max contribution, life insurance, employment contract with one yr. severance & fully vested retirement 4%.
- Wayne County - \$215,500 plus \$1200 travel per month, individual/family insurance coverage, 401K, life insurance and employment contract.
- Washington County - \$95,000 plus \$500 travel per month and employment contract. Columbus County - \$43,000 plus \$500 travel per month

William “Lee” Smith, III

Overview and Summary of

Accomplishments from 1993 to 2023 by Lee Smith, Administrations and County Commission Boards. County Manager in Columbus Co. NC, Washington Co. NC, Wayne County Co. NC & Chatham County GA.

Reserves - 3-month reserves established along with a board policy – aided in receiving higher bond ratings in two organizations from Baa to AA (2008) & Aaa to AAA (2016) status due to successful management of funds and financial planning as well as the reduction of short-term debt and supplied sufficient cash to pay advanced cost of 11 hurricanes with reimbursements from FEMA.

CIP - Capital Improvement Program reserve developed to pay for equipment and vehicles with cash eliminating need for short-term financing budgeted annual.

CCPD - Re-established the Chatham County Police Department in six months with \$2 million in expenditures less than was being paid to the City of Savannah annually.

Blueprint – Within 18 months of joining Chatham, a county-wide strategic plan was completed. Workforce, Quality of life, Education and health were the areas of concern by the community.

Industrial Park Project - developed 1100-acre industrial park. This industrial park included infrastructure including water, sewer, gas, rail, and interstate connection. The water and sewer connected two cities providing redundancy of these services for both as well as to the park. The availability from 1990 to 1993 created 1,600 new jobs and millions of dollars in new tax base. As of 2001, the park was fully occupied with 10 industries and 5,350 jobs. Property was purchased by the local County partnered development commission, water and sewer were funded the CDBG, city, and grant funds, the 22 mile natural gas line was funded by an appropriation by the General Assembly.

New payroll system – upon arrival in Chatham County in 2014, the payroll system was still being operated predominantly by paper. A new fully automated system was developed and implemented saving hours of work by every department and ultimately reducing cost of bi-weekly payroll.

New Budget and Finance automated system – the system allows for long term budget analysis, allows all departments to enter data in the same format and format that is better understood by Board members and the public. These formats remained the same annually allowing for better year to year detail comparisons.

New Tax System – a new tax system was installed connecting tax assessor, tax commissioner, board of equalization, Geographical Information Systems Department, and Building Safety (permits.) This allowed monthly updates use by all departments, realtors, law firms, the public and reporting to the Board periodically.

New Court System – new automated court record management system and jury system was implemented allowing connection of all courts as well as the detention center.

New Video Arraignment system – system was implemented allowing for video arraignment with inmates not having to be transferred reducing safety matters and reducing costs as well as making the court system more efficient.

Gracie – new Medical Information Exchange implementation (first County in Georgia) – over 40+ local medical facilities, hospitals and detention center are connected saving time when seeing patients in office, emergency rooms and detention center and the state correctional system. Booking and Health Assessment process time in the Detention Center was improved by implementation allowing for reduction of 65% in the time of processing. This system development and implementation allows medical personnel to treat patients faster by having all aspects of patient data including medications, medical history, etc.

New Building Safety system – allows for residents and contractors to purchase building permits, check updates online as well as pay for permits online reducing the need for visits to the office. System allows field permit officials to operate in real time when updating permits as projects are inspected allowing contractors to get “back to work” quicker.

Risk Management – Developed the County’s first Risk Management and Occupational Safety Department. This department has developed a culture of safety and has aided in reducing employee injuries allowing employees to get back to work quickly, trains ALL employees of the safety hazards in their line of work, developed certification programs such as driver safety. Ultimately, we were able to Self-fund and administer the Workers Compensation in-house. Reduced costs of this program by \$1.8 million the first year.

SPLOST 7 (sales tax equivalent of 1 cents)– Developed a long-term capital plan for recreation, roads, storm water drainage, economic development property and improvements, new Trial Courthouse (under construction) and Emergency Operations Center (final plans completed, construction to begin in 2023), etc. funded by the \$400 million in sales tax vs. property taxes. Over 47% of this sales tax is paid by tourist and visitors reducing the burden of the sale tax of Approximately \$188 million over five years. This tax is shared by the County and local cities.

CAD RMS – Replacing of the 20-year-old 911 system with a Next generation 911 centralized system with all municipalities participating. The \$10.5 million cost was covered by phone surcharges on land lines and cell phones. Also, our internal audit team preformed an analysis

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and forensic audit of all telecom companies both landline and cell phone companies there were 117 companies with contracts with users based through out the United States. This process brought about an additional \$1.3 million in missing surcharge payments from telecom companies reducing the cost to local citizens and businesses.

Calling All Managers – Established a quarterly meeting of all county and city managers for the purpose of developing better relationships between local governments and administrations. Has been extremely helpful when needing to discuss county-wide participation. I personally expanded this effort to all surrounding counties and their cities to also develop relationships and ultimately producing regional roadway, water, sewer, fiber, and drainage projects. These efforts providing cost sharing and reduced impacts as example reducing the effects of storm water, increasing broadband expansion to rural areas and expansion of water and sewer to housing developments and more importantly for industry as needed by existing and new industries creating jobs.

Performance and merit overhaul – Updated the performance and merit pay plan with utilizing an appraisal process for all 2200 employees. This system provided an annual work plan for every individual providing a management tool by which supervisors and administration can measure successes and failures.

Living Wage – Even before Covid the County adopted and utilized the Living Wage to ensure all employees will always stay ahead of the national living wage hourly amount. This aids in retention and recruitment of employees.

3 major storms (example Chatham County) – Managed staff and County through 3 hurricanes including emergency planning & response, clean-up, and housing. Received over \$33 million in FEMA funds in Hurricane Matthew alone. The county was able to utilize the policy driven reserves to adequately fund the up-front costs of the hurricane damage while waiting for reimbursements from FEMA. By close management and overview of costs, the actual cost to the County was \$1.2 million.

Renovation of Unit 5 in the detention center – the renovation was completed in 2017 with the intent of housing inmates with substance abuse and mental health issues allowing for medical treatment and observation.

Resiliency Office – Implemented a resiliency office to address the impacts of sea level rise and climate change. Position is reviewing the policies of the county and all cities for the purpose of developing polices and building ordinances that take climate change into consideration to reduce property impacts in the future.

Animal Services, CNT, Marine Patrol, CEMA and 911 – the merger and take-over by the County of these services providing uniform services across the county.

Executive Team – Developed an executive team that rotates various department managers ensuring all managers have proper input in actions of upper management as well as execution of new policies.

County Employee Medical Clinic - The County is self-insured regarding health plan. A third party was hired to maintain an employee health clinic for employees and their families. This process has reduced costs of employees going to outside physicians, emergency room or urgent care avoiding use of the self-insured plan with outside costs at higher rates. This process has increased participation of the new county wellness plan bringing forth healthier employees. Both processes have reduced annual costs by nearly \$2+ million per year.

Financial Policies – Developed Financial Policies in all three past organizations discussed with the Board as to effects to budget, financial consistency (major area for Bond Rating agencies in consideration of rates), clear understanding by the Board as to effects and need for adherence to said policies. The administration proposed said policies, worked with the Board ensure these policies met the Board's requirements and plans. The Board have final authorization. If changes are needed administration brought forth with Board review and consideration.

Library Systems – In Chatham and Wayne Counties developed a regional system Library system reducing the need of multiple library boards, provided for reduction of book and resource inventory by developing resource sharing with daily share services and shared personnel.

Department Measurements and Benchmarks – Over the last 25 years have developed internal strategic plans annually with 5-10 projections in every department for service demand, ways to provide better and more cost effective services to the public and reducing complaints. This process brought about departmental benchmarks and performance measurements providing for monthly adherence to standards. These results are reported to the Board quarterly for discussion, placed on social media platforms, reviewed in public townhall meetings (provided a platform for Board members and giving the public opportunity to provide input regarding services) county television by showing services provided by departments and demonstrating to the public the County's commitment to excellence.

CHAIRMAN OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Chester A. Ellis
Chairman



December 27, 2022

Chatham County Courthouse
Post Office Box 8161
Suite 210 - 124 Bull Street
Savannah, Georgia 31412

(912) 652-7950
(912) 652-7880 - fax
Chairman@chathamcounty.org

Re: Recommendation Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

As Chairman of the Chatham County Commission and individually, I submit this letter of support to Lee Smith, former manager of Chatham County. I have worked closely with Lee Smith and have found him to be attentive to details, a leader of staff, efficient, and effective in executing the task assigned to him.

In his duties as County Manager, Lee performed well and acted consistently in an ethical manner. I believe that any organization that employs him with his significant skills set would only be a better organization.

I hope this letter will be positively received by others in support of any endeavors Lee Smith does now or in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chester A. Ellis".

Chester A. Ellis, Chairman
Chatham County Commission

Candidate Introduction

WILLIAM “LEE” SMITH, III

EDUCATION

University of North Carolina – Wilmington – BS – Business Administration – Cameron School of Business

ICMA – Certified Accredited Manager – 25 years

University of NC Chapel Hill – Certified City/County Manager – Institute of Government - 1989

EXPERIENCE

Management Consultant	01/2023 – present
County Manager, Chatham County, Savannah, GA	2014 – 2023
County Manager, Wayne County, Goldsboro, NC	2001 – 2014
County Manager, Washington County, Plymouth, NC	1993 – 2001
Executive Director, Columbus Co. Econ. Dev. Comm., Whiteville, NC	1990 – 1993
County Emergency Mgmt. Dir./Deputy Mgr., Pamlico Co., Bayboro, NC	1986 – 1990

BACKGROUND

Chatham County has a population of 295,000. The County has 2,250 employees and I directly supervised 35 of them. The general fund budget was \$600M and the total budget was \$998M. The three most important issues facing Chatham County are:

1. Roadway & Bridges – due to the growth of the Savannah Georgia Ports along, Visitors and growing populations, traffic is increasing at rates over 18% a year with truck traffic being the greatest causing major damage to major highways, bridges, and secondary roads.
2. Workforce Development – with the new industries such Amazon, Hyundai, and many logistic centers, the need for skilled, pre-trained and educated individuals must be in place prior to new industry. At the present time, Chatham and surrounding counties are having to “catch-up” causing a strain the local technical and four year colleges.
3. Drainage – Chatham County averages 13 feet above sea level. The introduction of new industries, warehousing and new housing, the county drainage system is meeting capacity. Widening and deepening of canals, flood gates, and reservoirs are now required along with participation of developments to assist with reducing runoff and cost of improvements.

WILLIAM “LEE” SMITH, III

GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE TEAM

The City of Sarasota, Manager position interests me based on my experience over many years. I am very interested in your efforts, principles, strategic planning, coastal living knowledge, and forward-thinking approach. Per my research of the City, promoting and creating jobs is a high priority. Through most of my career, I have been responsible for and participated in the determination of the potential types of businesses matching the citizens’ and community principles. Locating new businesses is important while first committing to and retaining local businesses.

My passion is “team” development and establishing a great work environment. Counties are a service industry and without a well-trained and focused team, success will be slow or not be achievable. My research has shown the City has adopted standards along with programs to achieve success and I look forward to being a part of these programs and planning if chosen. Another item that attracted my interest is the City’s commitment to fair and reasonable budgets that adhere to the City’s financial Standards, keeping the Town in good standing according to governmental standards.

My management style is one of team building and involving all levels of employees to be assessed regularly and be a part of developing solutions for city/county issues. I would sum it up and say, my style involves participation and regular oversight of services and employees. It is further expected that management demonstrates to the team that they care, honor their commitments and “would never ask someone to do something they would not do themselves.”

Staff would say that I am fair, I keep to my word, open & honest, ethical and care about those I work with. Elected officials would say that I am honest, respectful, creative, a problem solver, good communicator, community oriented but not perfect.

In terms of strengths, I am a consensus builder, strong community partner, strong work ethics and team builder, 35 years of experience and good communicator. My weaknesses are that I can be impatient at times, can overload myself, sometimes not good at asking for assistance.

No one employee is the same; therefore, I have utilized a general appraisal methodology that measures effectiveness, attendance, work quality, etc. The key to success is the annual development of a work plan for every employee. Whereby, all supervisors and department managers meet with employees to jointly review what they do well and where improvements are needed.

At that point a jointly agreed upon plan is developed and understood so the employee comprehends the expectations and what is required to improve and must understand this plan must be adhered to. Last, employees should meet at least twice a year to discuss their successes and needed improvements. If we wait an entire year, we may set the employee up because failure of management does not recognize what is occurring until the issues are a major.

WILLIAM “LEE” SMITH, III

My most recent achievement was the establishment of a new county police force in a six-month period. The County and City of Savannah decided to part ways regarding police and the Commissioners gave me a budget and timeline of which both were met with an approximate \$3M reduction in police service but with higher service levels such as response times averaging 7 minutes or less. Most importantly we established a real “community” police force that talks with the businesses and citizens, participates in community events even on their own time and are seen as allies not enemies.

My biggest failure was in Wayne County, NC. The County developed and initiated an automated payroll system. BETA testing had small glitches; however, when the system went “live” major errors occurred causing major overpayments to employees. We utilized a third party company to aid in the transition. I believe my failure was depending too much on the third party, not bringing my team together more closely and listening to their concerns. I have since dealing with projects of that magnitude, have utilized a project manager to keep the process moving and keeping me informed of issues and progress. That was a major learning experience. The issue was eventually resolved.

Unfortunately, I have fired several people during my career for various reasons including, but not limited to theft, disorderly conduct, inability to do the job properly, and bringing about an unsafe work environment. The firing of someone should be no surprise to them if management and supervisors have been paying attention to issues and counseling the employee. Unless the infraction was great enough to warrant immediate termination, then the process of adhering to HR policies of progressive must be adhered to. It is never easy to terminate someone, but I have always approached these issues with complete data and documentation. Terminations must be done face to face in a safe environment with witnesses. Last, I try to keep my emotions out of the process; however, that is nearly impossible. Though the individual indeed must be terminated, I can’t help but think of the impact to the individual and families as well as the department of which the individual worked.

My first six months hired by the City of Sarasota:

1. 30 days - get to know the management team as a group and as individuals, meet with board members to see as a board where my attention should be placed according to their priorities. Also, meet with members to get a feel for processes, proper and preferred communication processes, and frequency. Budget review with team. Inspect and visit the City with staff and Council.
2. 60 days - review strategic plans and ordinances, continue to inspect City assets and familiarize myself with buildings, parks, problem areas, etc.
3. 90 days – continue to meet with community leaders to get a feel for what the concerns of community are to incorporate into my work plans approved by the Council while being sensitive to problematic issues.
4. 120 days – at this point I should have a sense of the culture of the community, regular community meetings should be scheduled and personally should be engrained in the

WILLIAM “LEE” SMITH, III

county, need for team sessions to see where the county stands with projects and general concerns. Have a mutually agreed upon work plan with recommendations, objectives, and priorities approved by the City Council.

I have had excellent relationships with the media as I regularly communicate with them, am always honest and forthright (except in cases of litigation details, personnel, etc. where items may be private by law). I hold a couple of meetings with media annually so not be surprised by a matter and ensuring “facts” are reported. Also, there is nothing in my background that would embarrass the City.

I have initiated utilization of social media platforms for public education, getting the facts out, notices, giving regular video updates and short sessions to stay ahead of community concerns. Also, there must be someone or a department that monitors all platforms to keep the Council and management informed of trends both positive and negative.

There are no community activists that will contact my next employer.

I enjoy spending time with my family, kayaking, concerts, festivals, traveling and cooking (taught by some of the best southern cooks), and like to volunteer occasionally with Habitat for Humanity and Food Bank. Love traveling. Just completed 100 days of travel in all 50 states fishing, hiking, camping, sightseeing, and photographing memorable moments.

SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE MYSELF

- Results-oriented
- Engaged
- Ambitious
- Diligent
- Passionate
- Analytical

REASON FOR DEPARTING MOST RECENT JOB

Fairly new board that were seeking a different direction for the county. There were a couple of highly intense projects which caused rifts among members and ultimately communication broke down which impacted administration. We negotiated a severance agreement, and I resigned Jan. 3rd of 2023. I have no regrets or hard feelings towards the county. I consider many of my Team members as family. I was given a positive letter of reference and recommendation by Chatham County. Since that time, I have contracted with private and government entities for services such as strategic planning, development of bid documents and grant writing. Spent time traveling,

WILLIAM “LEE” SMITH, III

initiated a nationwide job search in early 2024 and was honored to return to North Carolina for quality time and care giver for my mother prior to her death.

SALARY HISTORY

Negotiable utilizing advertised salary range.

Chatham County - \$253,500 plus \$1200 car allowance per month all insurances paid by the county including family benefits, 401k max contribution, life insurance, employment contract with one yr. severance & fully vested retirement 4%.

Wayne County - \$215,500 plus \$1200 travel per month, individual/family insurance coverage, 401K, life insurance and employment contract.

Washington County - \$95,000 plus \$500 travel per month and employment contract. Columbus County - \$43,000 plus \$500 travel per month.

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
WILLIAM LEE SMITH III**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Chatham County, GA	No Records Found
Wayne County, NC	No Records Found
State	
Georgia	No Records Found
North Carolina	No Records Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Chatham County, GA	No Records Found
Wayne County, NC	No Records Found
Federal	
Georgia	March 2019 – Lawsuit filed against Garden City including Mr. Smith in his Capacity as Chatham County Manager. May 2019 – Dismissed without prejudice. <i>*See Next Page for Candidate Explanation for Records Found</i>
North Carolina	No Records Found

Motor Vehicle

Georgia	No Records Found
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Credit

Very Good

Personal Bankruptcy

No Records Found

Sex Offender Registry

Not Listed

Education

Confirmed

**Background Check Summary for
WILLIAM LEE SMITH III**

Employment

Confirmed

Social MediaNothing of Concern Found

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

From: **william smith** <wlsmanager@outlook.com>
Subject: Re: Background Check Records that Require an Explanation
To: Monique Rogers <monique@cb-asso.com>

The lawsuit was with Chatham County and the County Sheriff. I do not recall the case details. As County Manager, I would automatically receive the lawsuit and forward it to the County Attorney. Typical for most to be terminated from the case due to no connection to the case

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

**Background Check Summary for
WILLIAM LEE SMITH III
Personal Disclosure**

Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

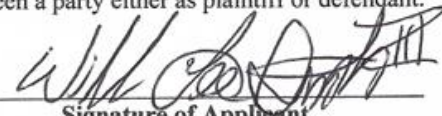
Name of Applicant: **William Lee Smith, III**

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes ☐ No ☒
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes ☐ No ☒
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes ☐ No ☒
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes ☐ No ☒
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes ☐ No ☒
6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated, driving under the influence, operating a vehicle impaired, or a similar offense?
Yes ☐ No ☒
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes ☐ No ☒
8. Please list all your social media accounts (Facebook / X (Twitter) / Instagram / LinkedIn, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one. LinkedIn
9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
Yes ☐ No ☒
10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.

Attested to: _____


Signature of Applicant

CB&A Reference Notes

**Reference Notes
William “Lee” Smith**

Wilbur Andy Anderson – Former Commissioner, Wayne County, NC 919-344-1202

Mr. Anderson was elected to the County Commission in 1993. He met Mr. Smith in 2001 and they worked together until Mr. Anderson retired in 2012. His comments are based on Mr. Smith’s job performance during the time that they worked together.

Mr. Smith was one of the best County Managers Mr. Anderson has ever known. Mr. Anderson was the odd man politically (meaning, the other Commissioners belonged to a different political party). Mr. Smith always made sure Mr. Anderson was aware of anything that happened, and he treated all the Commissioners equally. He was very honest and above board.

During the interview process the hiring panel stated that Mr. Smith was the best Manager they found. He did his homework and arrived at Wayne County extremely knowledgeable of their government. He worked well with others, worked overtime to complete projects, and brought several businesses to the community. He had a good knowledge of finance. Anyone creating a team always asked Mr. Smith to be part of the group because of his expertise.

Because Mr. Smith had a great deal of foresight on what was coming, he advised the Commission well on how to budget and manage their resources. He was active in securing funding from state agencies. The County owned a small airport. He wanted to show the public that the airport was something special. He formed a team to create a name and logo for the airport and was very proactive in advertising it. He successfully applied for grant monies to install a LED light system in the airport, they were one of only three airports at the time to have this ultra-modern lighting. The Wayne Executive Airport is one of the finest airports in North Carolina, thanks to the efforts of Mr. Smith.

Everyone hired by Mr. Smith was a good fit for the role and organization. He terminated the employment of individuals who were not meeting expectations. He is a go-getter and does not sit behind a desk. He is customer service oriented and stays on top of every issue. He advised the Commissioners well and they sought his recommendations on how to resolve issues. He generally completes assignments immediately, and he is always very timely.

Mr. Smith has not personally been involved in a controversial situation, but he was involved in controversial decisions made by the Commission. Nothing in his background would embarrass an employer. One of two of the new Commissioners at the time of his departure might disagree with this reference but they have a different management style and sought to make many changes within the organization.

Mr. Anderson was not on the Commission when Mr. Smith left and has no personal knowledge of what transpired. Due to an election the Commission went from having a majority of one political party to having a majority of the other political party. Mr. Anderson heard that the new Commissioners wanted a manager who belonged to their political party.

**Reference Notes
William “Lee” Smith**

Based on what Mr. Anderson knows, he would hire Mr. Smith and highly recommends him. He is a great municipal manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Knowledgeable,
- Go-getter,
- Motivated,
- Interacts well with others,
- Helpful, and
- Manager and director.

Strengths: Finance, management, proactive, accomplishes tasks, visionary, manages staff well, keeps things moving.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Jack Best – Former Commissioner, Wayne County, NC 919-920-9988

Mr. Best has known Mr. Smith since 2001 and worked with him as a County Commissioner for eight years.

Mr. Smith rated 95 of 100 on his review. He took a County that was cash poor and brought it to a very comfortable position. The County now pays cash for items like cars, equipment, and computers. He improved their bond rating and did a wonderful job handling the finances. He is his own man and has his own ideas. He knows how to get the job done and does well.

The only thing Mr. Best expects is not to have any surprises. Mr. Smith kept the Commissioners very well informed. He was willing to talk through the issues. Mr. Best did not always agree with Mr. Smith, but he was frequently right. They talked two to three times a week and attended Commission meetings every other week. Their interactions were always very good.

Mr. Smith made excellent decisions when hiring personnel. He was hands-on and he delegated authority. He improved the community during his tenure. He was innovative and he kept the organization functioning at a high level. He was not perfect when dealing with the public, but he had a good rapport with community leaders.

Mr. Smith put a team together from the staff, the County Commissioners, and residents to build a nice civics center. Residents complained about the project until it was completed, and they realized how beneficial it is. He wanted to build an animal shelter, but some Commissioners felt the cost was too high. Mr. Smith turned to the community and gathered donations equaling 10-20% of the necessary funding.

Reference Notes

William “Lee” Smith

Mr. Smith is absolutely customer service oriented and a problem solver. He is very quick to complete tasks and he never procrastinates. He determines what needs to happen and does it.

The only controversy involving Mr. Smith occurred after an election. The new Board members were of a different political party than the Commissioners who had been on the Board for 100 years. The new Commissioners changed the entire focus of the organization. From day one they wanted to terminate Mr. Smith’s employment and hire a manager from their own political party. They kept him in place for a year, so they did not have to pay severance, and then parted ways. These Board members are the only individuals who might disagree with this reference.

Mr. Best would hire Mr. Smith tomorrow if he had a job available. Mr. Best likes Mr. Smith as a person and feels he is a great manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Very honest,
- Hardworking,
- Astute business person,
- Good financial manager,
- Manages employees well, and
- Did a wonderful job.

Strengths: Good financial manager, treats employees well and gets along with most of them, managed a large staff and a \$70 million dollar budget well, did an exceptional job.

Weaknesses: If he had any, it would be that he likes to do things his own way.

Dead Kicklighter – Commissioner, Chatham County, GA 912-507-1343

Mr. Kicklighter has worked with Mr. Smith since 2014. Mr. Smith was an excellent manager, and he did a great job for Chatham County. He was very intelligent, and he communicated well with staff and with the Commission. He made good decisions both when hiring and in general.

Mr. Smith was often out in the community. He was very personable, so he interacted well with residents. He provided the information they needed in a professional way. He kept the Board informed through phone calls and texts. When they requested information, he confirmed the request through email and then followed up with a hard copy of the data.

A previous Commission, prior to Mr. Kicklighter’s tenure on the Board which began in 2001, allowed a developer to build infrastructure that did not meet County standards with the understanding that the Homeowner’s Association (HOA) was to maintain the drainage system and the roads in certain areas. Decades later when the infrastructure started failing, the HOA

Reference Notes William “Lee” Smith

could not afford to replace it and the developer was long gone. Mr. Smith held meetings with staff and the HOA. He developed a public/private partnership in which the HOA contributed a substantial amount of money to bring the system up to code, and the County took control of roads and drainage in the area. He involved employees from all pertinent departments and helped right a wrong in the community.

Customer service is important to Mr. Smith. He has good financial skills, and he is good about completing tasks within the timeframe given. He responds to stress as well as anyone.

Anyone leading a large government body faces controversial issues, and Mr. Smith was no exception. He handled each scenario with dignity, respect, and dedication to the County and its employees. His background is clear of anything that would concern an employer. He does have detractors in the community, which is common for those in his position, but Mr. Kicklighter did not name anyone specifically.

Mr. Kicklighter would hire Mr. Smith. He will do a great job for any community fortunate enough to hire him. They will be satisfied with his job performance.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Intelligent,
- Thorough,
- Hard working,
- Compassionate, and
- Kind.

Strengths: Brings solutions to the table when presenting issues, leads in a way that the staff knows he means business but still well liked by them.

Weaknesses: As long as the elected officials clearly communicate what they want from Mr. Smith, they will have no issues with him.

Michael Kaigler – Assistant County Manager, Chatham County, GA 912-657-7080

Mr. Kaigler has known Mr. Smith since 2014. Mr. Kaigler is currently serving as the Interim Manager. Mr. Smith did a good job for Chatham County. He served in several capacities in North Carolina and worked well with the former Chairman.

Chatham County has a hiring system with interview panels, though the final decisions are typically made by Mr. Smith and his assistants. His decisions both in hiring and in general were good. His strongest trait is innovation, though he was asked to be more of a change agent in

Reference Notes

William “Lee” Smith

Chatham County as the previous manager had been in the role for more than two decades and the organization was significantly behind the times.

While Mr. Smith did not attend all community meetings, he was always there when he was asked to be. He worked well with the public and many of the residents were sad to see him leave. He was good about keeping the leadership team informed and he involved them in the decision-making process.

Mr. Smith likes to be out front, rather than behind a desk. He walked through the departments and took random employees to lunch periodically to listen to their input. He coined the phrase they still use, which is “Team Chatham” and helped staff work cohesively as a team.

The County’s payroll system was antiquated, and Mr. Smith led the team to install new software. Employees who had worked for the County for years resisted the change, but he led the way and eventually they realized it was a better way to work. He also developed a customer service system where residents can submit their request for service or file a complaint. He ensured that every entry was always given a response, even when the County was not able to fill their request.

One skill Mr. Smith prides himself on is keeping up to date with the financial documentation and budget. He will take the information home and pour over it in his downtime. He coped very well in stressful situations. He internalizes some things but handles stress well.

Mr. Smith has not been involved in anything controversial. The Board changed after an election and a minority of the Board wanted things that were either not possible or were questionable from an ethics standpoint. Mr. Smith stood up to them, which eventually led to his departure. Also, following a long-term manager can be difficult and some in the community wanted the same leadership as they had before, Mr. Smith’s style was different.

Mr. Kaigler would hire Mr. Smith as he is an excellent manager. Employees who work for him have very positive things to say about him.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Caring,
- Outgoing,
- Sympathetic,
- Friendly,
- Decisive, and
- Outgoing.

**Reference Notes
William “Lee” Smith**

Strengths: Very personable, very organized, works well with others, developed the County’s first strategic plan.

Weaknesses: Time management and perhaps his willingness to accommodate some elected officials.

Paula Krissler – Executive Director, Healthy Savannah, Savannah, GA 912-272-9494

Ms. Krissler met Mr. Smith shortly after he was hired in 2014 and she is honored to be one of his references. Healthy Savannah is entirely focused on policy and systems change which requires engagement with the City and County. They met on several occasions, and he attended their meetings. He did a great job. He was very supportive of their organization and accomplished amazing things for the County.

Decisions made by Mr. Smith are good. He was visible in the community. Their organization was known for handing out inexpensive plastic bicycle pins. Mr. Smith ensured that he always had one to show his engagement with the community. Healthy Savannah had over 200 public and private partners, and he engaged well with all of them.

Ms. Krissler was surprised the first time Mr. Smith called her personally, he is very responsive. He faced both sides of any aisle and kept them equally informed. He was also good about sharing information when she was trying to understand a situation. He has a good perspective.

The grants they received for the Trail plan involved SPLOST funds, and it languished for over a decade at the County waiting for the required plans to be developed before they could move forward. Mr. Smith was an integral part of the process to create the plans and secure the matching federal dollars. The project finally moved forward through his efforts. This project was somewhat controversial because it involved neighborhoods and communities, but he was levelheaded and listened to all sides while keeping the project moving forward.

Controversy existed but Ms. Krissler stayed out of it. She does feel that the Commission tended to be less progressive than Mr. Smith is. That said, she was still shocked when Mr. Smith was suspended and does not know the reason why. She has spoken with others in the community, and they were just as surprised as she was, they just did not see any negatives in him. He handled the stress of the situation well. She is not aware of anything in Mr. Smith’s background that would concern an employer.

Ms. Krissler would hire Mr. Smith, she felt he was a great manager for their community, and he was always very accessible.

Reference Notes William “Lee” Smith

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Strong,
- Smart,
- Engaging,
- Community minded, and
- Organized.

Strengths: Courage, charisma, dependability, integrity, respect for others, and flexibility.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Linda Cramer – Assistant County Manager, Chatham County, GA 912-433-7615

Ms. Cramer has known Mr. Smith since 2014. He led many different types of projects while working with elected officials on the Board as well as constitutional officers. Mr. Smith brought his experience from Wayne County to Chatham which was very helpful in resolving their issues. One of the first projects they worked together on was a strategic plan, which previous managers had avoided. He first met with constituents to learn of their vision for the community and then worked with staff and the elected officials to create a plan and move forward.

When hiring Mr. Smith made good decisions. He included department heads in the interview process and listened to their feedback but was responsible for the final hiring decision. His decisions in general were good. He was not afraid to implement change when it was needed if he could. Change is not always possible when working with constitutional officers. He really focused on the strategic plan and aligned the organization to develop processes around it. He was not afraid of confrontation; he handled it well while diffusing the situation.

Being out in the community was not Mr. Smith’s main responsibility. He created a public information office to relay some information. During the pandemic he led meetings on zoom. He worked well with the public in Commission meetings. He kept everyone informed to the extent appropriate as some matters were confidential.

The County police force was combined with the City of Savannah. While being very costly, they also noticed that officers spent all their time in the city and not in the unincorporated areas of the County. They decided to reestablish their own police department and worked together on it. Mr. Smith hired the Police Chief, brought over some of the officers from Savannah, and contracted with the Sheriff until they were fully staffed.

When residents had a complaint, they previously had to call the office. Mr. Smith implemented a citizen records management system so anyone can go online and submit service requests. This system reduced call volume and improved their capacity to track and respond to issues.

Reference Notes William “Lee” Smith

While Mr. Smith had good financial skills, that was not his focus. However, he worked for smaller counties where he wore many hats and so he understood the process. He met deadlines when it was possible, but at times they all ran into roadblocks. He could be firm, but he was not a yeller. During stressful situations he worked with his team to resolve the issue.

Some of their work was controversial, the police demerger is one example. They have a volunteer fire department that runs via subscriptions, but no one was paying for them. The County is in the process of taking ownership and that has been controversial. Also, Mr. Smith was the final person for the grievance process on employees recommended for dismissal. Lastly, when they had to make a change in the courts, they received push back and he had to stand his ground. He handled these difficult situations well.

Mr. Smith left the County when a new Chairman came on board and wanted a change. They put Mr. Smith on investigation and promoted the Assistant Manager, who they knew, to the position. He had detractors in the community though this is common for someone in his position.

Ms. Cramer would hire Mr. Smith. He is a good manager though he needs a good admin to help him with scheduling. He is very talented, and he did well in Chatham County, but he may have even more success in a smaller municipality.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Talented,
- Approachable to the staff,
- Decisive,
- Experienced,
- Creative, and
- Networks to resolve issues.

Strengths: Experience, looks to connect and collaborate rather than recreating the wheel, strategic planning.

Weaknesses: A few times he got ahead of the Board, meaning he was going down a path and had not communicated to the Board members. Also, he looked for connections between agencies which was not a weakness, but it could slow progress. Lastly, he and his two assistant managers attended all the same meetings. It may have been more efficient to divide responsibilities between the three.

Will Peebles – Reporter, Savannah Morning News, Savannah, GA 706-699-4681

Mr. Peebles has lived in Chatham County since 2016. In 2022 Mr. Peebles took over the city beat, and his first assignment was to investigate Mr. Smith’s suspension. Mr. Peebles never got

Reference Notes William “Lee” Smith

an exact answer to what led to the suspension and the off the record comments seemed like it was primarily a disagreement with elected officials who had a different vision for the community. Mr. Smith is not a yes man, and he is also realistic. He really liked his job and if he was given a blank slate to work, he would still be the manager in Chatham County. His tenures in Chatham and in his previous positions were far longer than average for the field.

Mr. Smith is not afraid to ask for help or guidance if he does not know an answer. He was very transparent and open with Mr. Peebles.

Mr. Smith ran Commission meetings and answered questions, without running over the elected officials. Nothing ever seemed to be off in Board meetings, he worked with difficult Commissions and was often the voice of reason.

The most common comment that Mr. Peebles heard after Mr. Smith was suspended was “What did Lee Smith do?” The community seemed very surprised by the suspension. Mr. Peebles personally feels that if Mr. Smith had done something worthy of a suspension that the Commission would have had no qualms in stating these actions publicly. It seemed like Mr. Smith told some Commissioners no a few more times than they would have liked him to. Mr. Smith knows government and he is smart.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Likes his work,
- Realistic,
- Transparent,
- Open, and
- Likeable.

Strengths: Capable of working with elected officials who are more politicians than civil servants, legal minded, very transparent, very open, likeable.

Weaknesses: In Mr. Smith’s personnel file the one negative that Mr. Peebles remembers is communication, but he cannot remember the date and it seems like it was noted towards the beginning of Mr. Smith’s tenure in Chatham County.

Borden Parker – County Attorney, Wayne County, NC

Pll City Attorney - F.S.
119.071(4)(d)2.w.

Mr. Parker is a County employee but also works in a private law firm. He has known Mr. Smith since 2001. Mr. Smith did an extremely good job for Wayne County and was a very competent manager.

Reference Notes
William “Lee” Smith

Interactions between Mr. Parker and Mr. Smith are exceptionally good. Mr. Parker considers Mr. Smith a friend but acknowledges that they were not close enough to socialize outside of work.

Mr. Smith made good decisions when hiring personnel. His decisions in general were very good. He was an innovative manager who kept the organization running at a high-performance level. He was a leader who rallied the employees around the vision of the elected body.

Mr. Parker is an old country lawyer who prefers not to use email. They met in person three to four times a week. Mr. Smith was very good about keeping others informed. His work was completed on time.

The only complaints Mr. Parker heard about Mr. Smith were from individuals who wanted Mr. Smith to do something that he felt was not in the best interest of the County. He worked tremendously well with the public.

Mr. Smith managed the budgeting process very differently from the manager he replaced. He streamlined the process, added more accountability, and made it easier to understand. The Board trusted the budget was well done and overall, they did not feel the need to scrutinize it. Mr. Smith has excellent financial skills.

Mr. Smith and the Board decided it was time for Mr. Smith to resign. Some might consider the incident controversial, but Mr. Parker does not. Mr. Parker is not personally aware of anything in Mr. Smith’s background that would embarrass an employer. Though Mr. Parker could not name anyone who would disagree with this reference, some in the community might say Mr. Smith was too controlling and wanted to do things his way rather than how the Commissioners wanted. Mr. Parker does not agree with this assessment.

Mr. Parker was on the hiring panel that selected Mr. Smith and would hire him again. He was a good manager for Wayne County.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Extremely competent,
- Very energetic,
- Intelligent,
- People person,
- Hard working, and
- Willing to think outside the box.

Strengths: Good with finances, good at managing staff.

Weaknesses: Works too hard.

**Reference Notes
William “Lee” Smith**

Rita Hodges – Former Chairman of the School Board, Lenoir County, NC 252-560-9392

Ms. Hodges met Mr. Smith in the early 2000’s. She interacted with him as the Chairman of the school Board in a neighboring County and served on a regional mental health board with him. She has the utmost respect for and highest opinion of Mr. Smith and his abilities.

Mr. Smith was very knowledgeable, always professional, and he managed tasks well. His job performance was excellent, and he earned the highest marks possible on reviews. He interacted very well with others.

As Ms. Hodges does not live in the County, she was not privy to every hiring choice. However, the employees hired by Mr. Smith that she interacted with were top notch. Mr. Smith’s decisions in general were very good.

Mr. Smith was an innovator who thought outside the box. He assessed current operations before making any changes. He then improved processes until they functioned at the highest possible level. He was very good about keeping others informed, primarily through email but sometimes via the telephone.

The mental health board faced a very sensitive personnel issue where someone accused a provider of improprieties. Mr. Smith resolved the situation. He had good financial skills and was always quick to respond to phone calls and requests for information. Everyone that Ms. Hodges knows and works with would agree with the statements in this reference.

Ms. Hodges is not aware of anything controversial in Mr. Smith’s private or personal background. She has not discussed his departure from the County with Mr. Smith, but her understanding is that the resignation was politically influenced and not due to job performance.

Without a doubt Ms. Hodges would hire Mr. Smith. Any municipality would be fortunate to have Mr. Smith as their manager. He is an asset.

Words or phrases used to describe Lee Smith:

- Professional,
- Knowledgeable,
- Extremely competent
- Top notch individual,
- Good communicator, and
- Innovative.

Reference Notes
William "Lee" Smith

Strengths: Communication.

Weaknesses: His plate is so full that he is always busy.

Prepared by: Lynelle Klein
Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Internet Research

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
December 5, 2022

Smith GONE - Long-suspended county manager, Chatham reach severance agreement; commission appoints Michael Kaigler interim

Author/Byline: Will Peebles

The Chatham Commission on Friday approved the resignation of now-former County Manager **Lee Smith**, who has been on administrative leave since July 21, and formally began contract negotiations with Assistant County Manager Michael Kaigler, making him **Smith's** official successor. Kaigler had been serving as interim manager since **Smith's** suspension.

Chatham County Chairman Chester Ellis said after a lot of back and forth with **Smith's** lawyer, Brent Savage of Savannah-based Savage Turner Pinckney Savage & Sprouse, they were finally able to come to an agreement.

Smith, reached by text Friday, said the day was bittersweet. "Today is somewhat bittersweet for me. I tremendously enjoyed my time as part of Team Chatham and will always consider the entire team as family. I am glad the negotiations were finalized today so myself and Chatham County can move forward. I am pursuing opportunities in a number of places but consider Savannah home. I plan to maintain my home here and possibly return when retirement rolls around," a text from **Smith** read.

Ellis did not divulge any details about **Smith's** severance agreement and told reporters he would rather they "get it in writing" to avoid any inaccuracies, though he also said the contract "will be made public." Savannah Morning News acquired the agreement from **Smith's** lawyers Friday afternoon. In **Smith's** severance agreement, most questions surrounding his resignation are answered, but not all.

What we know:

Smith will officially resign as county manager, effective Jan. 2, 2023. **Smith** will remain on county payroll for a full year, receiving bi-weekly installments of \$9,931.20, for a total of \$258,211.20. The agreement outlines this as "nine months' salary in accordance with his employment contract and additional three months' salary as is stated in the Chatham County Enabling Act." Additionally, the county will continue to make employer pension contributions until Jan. 2. The county will stop paying **Smith's** annual car allowance of \$7,200 per year and will make no further contributions to **Smith's** retirement plan after Jan. 2. **Smith** may be eligible to draw benefits as allowed in accordance with the pension and health plan not to exceed 12 months from the agreement.

Still no reason given on why **Smith** dismissed. In a previous interview with SMN, **Smith** said he believed the reasons for his suspension to be "personal and political," but even after the severance agreement was approved Friday, Ellis refused to say why **Smith** was suspended, again deferring to the agreement itself. But the agreement didn't have any information on why Smith

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

was suspended. In the agreement is a stipulation: "**Smith** has not engaged in, nor is **Smith** aware of, any misconduct or wrongdoing on the party of the County of any kind or any regard." Additionally, the agreement stipulated that **Smith** will not sue the county "out of or in connection with the employment relationship, previously existing between them, or the termination of that relationship," unless the county violates the agreement in any way. "Let me just say, I wish **Mr. Smith** well. I guess some might say I might have been his cheerleader," Ellis said.

Smith said in a previous interview that the whole process -- uncertainty about why he was suspended, dealing with severance negotiations, watching his team carry on without him -- has been rough on him both mentally and emotionally. When people ask him why he was suspended, he doesn't have an answer. "I tell them: 'I don't know, I must have been in a coma. Because I don't know what I did,'" **Smith** said. "Nobody's telling me anything. So, all I can say is: it has to be personal and very political."

In the time since his suspension, **Smith** and his lawyer have been negotiating a severance agreement with the county. **Smith** and Savage received an initial severance agreement sent by the county on Aug. 25 and a second proposal on Sept. 6. The later agreement included a smaller payout. **Smith** told the Savannah Morning News last month that he sought three things from the severance agreement: vestment in the county's pension fund; health insurance in retirement; and the equivalent of nine months' pay.

Smith's contract called for the nine months' salary buyout should he be terminated without cause. **Smith's** salary at the time of his suspension was \$235,100, meaning he was contractually due \$176,325. According to Savage, **Smith** was pursuing a higher payout.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
November 6, 2022

Suspended Chatham manager speaks about his ouster

Author/Byline: Will Peebles

In July, Chatham County Manager **Lee Smith** was called into Chatham Commission Chairman Chester Ellis' office. At that meeting, he said Ellis was "very, very nice" and "compassionate," but ultimately handed **Smith** a letter, dated July 19, in which the chairman explained he was suspending **Smith** and placing him under investigation due to an unspecified "recent chain of events."

But even now, more than 100 days later, **Smith** has yet to be told what he did wrong or the findings of any supposed investigation. He still hasn't been removed from his position, not by resignation, termination or otherwise. "I do believe Chairman Ellis was trying to protect me from being fired by the [commission]," **Smith** said. "I believe that wholeheartedly, and others do also. It just was a way to block a [removal] vote, quite honestly." Chatham County code requires a two-thirds vote -- six of the nine members -- to remove a county manager from office, but they must adopt a preliminary resolution stating the reasons for removal. This preliminary resolution must also pass by more than two-thirds vote.

In the time since his suspension, **Smith** and his lawyer, Brent Savage of Savannah-based Savage Turner Pinckney Savage & Sprouse law firm, have been trying to negotiate a severance agreement with the county, thus far unsuccessfully. **Smith** and Savage received the initial severance agreement sent by the county on Thursday, Aug. 25. They received another severance agreement from the county on Sept. 6, this time with a smaller payout, and a request for an answer by Tuesday, Sept. 13, 51 days ago as of Nov. 3. **Smith** said there are three things he's asking for in the severance agreement: He wants to be vested by the county to have a pension in retirement; to get health insurance in retirement; and nine months' salary. All three were in the agreement, **Smith** said. **Smith** found the offer agreeable but county leaders reneged. "I signed it, we sent it back, and they then pulled the offer," **Smith** said. "My attorney and I, we looked at filing suit against the board for not fulfilling their obligations [in the severance agreement] and giving me something which I signed in good faith."

Now, **Smith** is still waiting, and he says the whole process -- uncertainty about why he was suspended, dealing with severance negotiations, watching his team carry on without him -- has been rough on him both mentally and emotionally. When people ask him why he was suspended, he doesn't have an answer. "I tell them: 'I don't know, I must have been in a coma. Because I don't know what I did,'" **Smith** said. "Nobody's telling me anything. So, all I can say is: it has to be personal and very political."

A change in attitude toward Smith

A few years ago, **Smith** came out as gay. "I went through a pretty bad divorce after I came here, and soon after that, I came out as gay. And I don't wear pride flags or anything like that. I'm just

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

who I am," **Smith** said. "And I will say that I felt a difference with board members after that happened. It is what it is. You can like me; you can dislike me. I am who I am."

Smith says after coming out he felt that he was viewed differently by some members of Chatham Commission, though he specifically said Ellis treated him no differently after. "I would say with the chairman. No. But with some of the other board members? Yes. I do," **Smith** said. "I can be criticized for this, whatever happens, happens. But I do believe that just the way I'm treated has changed. I just feel disrespected."

Commission complaints

While he claims to not know the exact reason some commissioners want him removed as manager, he has suspicions. **Smith** says through conversations with commission members he deduced that their complaints stemmed from two things: Their inability to review **Smith's** performance formally, and that he was not communicating "the way they thought I should communicate." But since the county has yet to provide him with reasoning for his suspension, he's not sure. All he knows is that someone -- or more -- wants him gone.

In the time since he was put on leave he's been applying for jobs elsewhere. But due to media coverage of his suspension and supposed investigation, he says employers are hesitant to give him a callback. "I've been applying for jobs. I can't even get a return call on jobs because this is still outstanding," **Smith** said. "You look on Google, and you're gonna see this first: That I've been suspended and under investigation." "This literally has hurt me so badly. You can't imagine. And I'm going to use the words 'absolutely terrified' about my future. I'm 58 years old," **Smith** said. "Maybe some decade I can retire, we'll see. But right now, I plan to work until I'm way, way gray."

Despite missing his friends and coworkers in "Team Chatham," **Smith** is fine with leaving, he said, provided the county meets his requests in the severance agreement. "I'm just looking at what I'm owed. What I deserve for the job I've done in eight and a half years," **Smith** said. "I don't have a single thing in my file. I've never been reprimanded, in writing, or in public, or I mean, nothing."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 24, 2022

Chatham wants millage rate increase

Author/Byline: Katie Nussbaum

The Chatham Commission is scheduled to adopt a new budget -- and the property tax millage rate that goes with it -- at this Friday's meeting, the final regularly scheduled session this fiscal year. Yet, there remains unresolved details.

County Manager **Lee Smith** has called for a fiscal year 2023 budget of \$859 million that would require the commission maintain the 2022 millage rate, which is considered a tax increase as the county's tax digest has increased over the last year.

Commission Chairman Chester Ellis, meanwhile, is lobbying for adoption of the rollback rate, which is the millage that will generate the same amount of revenue in 2023 as was produced in 2022. Doing so would lower the general fund millage by approximately 1 mill or \$1 for every \$1,000 of a property's assessed value and would also lower taxes specific to unincorporated Chatham residents and those who pay for the Chatham Area Transit Authority.

Smith and the county staff declined to submit a budget proposal that adjusts to the rollback rate. The difference in general fund revenue between the existing and rollbacked millage rate is approximately \$22 million. Here are several areas where those extra dollars would go. All percentages are based on the difference between the FY22 adopted amount and the FY23 proposed amount.

District Attorney and Public Defender offices

These two pillars of Chatham's criminal justice system will see increased budget dollars. The District Attorney's office is set to receive an additional \$330,000 in funds, although that amount is nearly \$500,000 below what was requested by District Attorney Shalena Cook-Jones. The Public Defender's office will see a bigger bump: more than \$500,000, or a 15% increase.

Museums and community centers

Chatham County will make significant increased investments in county-operated museums, such as the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum and the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force, and in its four community centers at Lake Mayer, Frank Murray, Tom Triplett, and the Chatham Co. Aquatic Center. The museums will get an increase of 88.9% to \$224,720 and the community center budget will increase 42.9% to \$227,131. These facilities have seen decreased use - and lower budget allowances - in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Risk reduction and intervention programs

The Front Porch, a community-based juvenile crime risk reduction program, will get a 16.9% increase to \$268,039. Similarly, Youth Intercept, another intervention program, will get a 16.8% increase to \$324,206.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Emergency management agency

The county's emergency management budget will increase by 13.5% to \$1,742,952. Much of those dollars are earmarked for increased employee compensation. The budgets for printing and binding, travel, and vehicles also were expanded.

Public information office

The public information budget will increase 52% to \$841,352, with much of that dedicated to employee compensation and related benefits.

County manager's office

The county manager's budget will increase slightly by 3.7% to \$1,311,999.

Solid waste fee hike coming

According to the budget, a recent financial analysis of the dry trash fee turned up a deficit of more than \$640,000 in FY23. The recent audit of the solid waste users determined that approximately 3,300 residences were not paying the current \$85 fee. County Manager **Lee Smith** is recommending the fee increase to \$96 annually. Additionally, Smith recommends that the county utilize a consultant to review the solid waste program for efficiencies and processes later in the year. Unincorporated residents will also pay a fee for fire service this year for the first time.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
September 1, 2021

County manager: Beleaguered 911 center for you in an emergency

This is an op-ed by Chatham County Manager **Lee Smith**.

Chatham County Communications, better known as 911, is a major service provided to our community. The department is responsible for routing emergency calls from citizens, visitors and motorists in an urgent situation or reporting an event witnessed. These calls consist of medical assistance needed, vehicular incidents, dangerous situations and the list goes on.

These calls require expeditious but concise data entry such as name, location, nature of the call, assessment of the situation and what emergency response services may be needed as directed by professional and dedicated 911 telecommunicators.

As noted in a news story published in this newspaper in early August, the 911 center has several vacant positions. However, the center consoles are always fully staffed, as 911 management has rearranged shifts to ensure full coverage as has been done for more than two years.

The county is recommending increasing salaries for telecommunicators in an attempt to better retain and attract qualified candidates. As additional positions are filled, 911 management is working to reduce 12 hour work shifts to reduce personnel fatigue.

The communication's center answers calls as quickly as possible; however, please keep in mind there are times the 911 center experiences a higher than normal level of calls due to multiple emergency events. These peak times will cause delays in answering calls and in some cases the incoming call will "roll" to an answering system. Your call has not been lost. The 911 system will automatically call the incoming number back with a telecommunicator prepared to take your information.

The 911 center receives over 10,500 calls per week with approximately 40% of those calls being administrative non-emergency calls. Citizens can help themselves and all other citizens by not calling 911 for non-emergency calls. These calls are holding telecommunicators for long periods of time creating long wait times for real emergencies.

Citizens can help to reduce the center's call volume by not calling 911 with non-emergency calls. Problems such as water meters, potholes, etc. are not emergencies. If you want to contact Chatham County with non-emergent items, please go to MyChatham.org on your mobile device's app or play store, download the app and register to report these types of incidents.

If you need information regarding a city or town service please contact them directly. We will begin a campaign to advertise these numbers in the next 30 days. The county will be working with all municipalities to begin a new process of non-emergent service calls within the next few months to direct you to the appropriate entity.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

COVID-19 has produced a myriad of problems affecting 911. Hospitals are experiencing a heavier than normal patient load in emergency rooms. This in turn is increasing the wait time of ambulances waiting to admit patients which in turn affects 911. Additionally, people experiencing mild symptoms or possible contact with COVID-19 should contact a medical provider, not 911.

The 911 service is a crucial part of emergency response for over 350,000 people every day, including regular citizens, visitors and commuting workers coming from other areas. The County estimates receiving over 600,000 calls in 2021.

We need your help to keep Chatham County safe and allow 911 to do its job to dispatch emergency services such as fire, rescue and law enforcement to save lives.

Your Turn

Lee Smith

Guest columnist

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Atlanta Journal-Constitution
August 6, 2021

You might experience delays when calling the Chatham County 911 call center. Here's why
Author/Byline: Katie Nussbaum

Savannah and Chatham County residents dialing 911 to report an emergency are experiencing delays in the calls being answered as the center faces a shortage of operators. The lags are marked by repeated rings. For those who abandon the calls, the system has a mechanism to seize those calls and give a return call with automated prompts, which will place the caller back in the queue for an operator. The 911 call center currently has about 20 vacancies, according to Chatham County Manager **Lee Smith**. "It's a major problem, but we're not at a crisis yet," **Smith** said.

The shortage creates a domino-like effect. When an emergency call comes in, operators stay on the line until first responders are on site. They cannot work other calls in the meantime. "So that means if you've got 12 or 15 people on shift that takes a person totally out of the loop. So quite frankly, when we peak out like that, there's not a lot you can do. You try to expedite calls, but expediting calls can be dangerous," he said. Several calls made to 911 recently by former Savannah City Council member Julian Miller went unanswered. Miller was calling to report a person who appeared to be having a medical episode along Abercorn Street. "He was leaning over like he was going to fall into traffic and cars were actually changing lanes to get around him. It was a dangerous situation," he said. The first two calls Miller made went unanswered for a combined 28 rings. Prior to getting elected to city council Miller served as the spokesperson for the Savannah Police Department, so he called an officer he knew to report the situation. In the meantime he received a callback from the automated system and after dialing one for an emergency, the phone rang another 12 times. Miller said the situation was frustrating. "It's kind of a hopeless feeling when you're waiting on an ambulance," Miller said.

Chatham County took over the 911 center in 2018. The operation serves Savannah and all Chatham County municipalities except for Tybee Island, which has its own 911 system. Fully staffed, the county's call center has about 100 operators and often competes with private industries and other employers like the Georgia Ports Authority for employees. "Sometimes with private industry, we're not able to compete at the same level. So it is very tough for local governments," **Smith** said.

To offset the shortage, operators are working longer shifts, but **Smith** said overtime can be dangerous for a stressful job. His office along with the 911 team and human resources are currently looking at ways to scale back the current 12-hour shifts by anywhere from two to four hours. "Twelve hours is too stressful and I think that is part of the issue; they're very stressed, that is a, a very difficult job. It's a thankless job," he said. "Those folks take a beating with folks not just trying to hear a call, but they're trying to de-escalate situations. So it's not just with medical protocols, they become mental health counselors. We deal with a couple thousand suicide attempts a year, which they de-escalate many times. That is very stressful." Non-emergency calls. Many local residents view 911 as the main contact number for local

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

government. Non-emergency calls accounted for 90,048 911 calls between Jan. 1 and Aug. 3, or about 40% of the 310,348 calls. Many of those calls are in regards to water, sewer or other municipal services, **Smith** said. "I know those calls may be important to you, and that you've got a concern about your water, or about a cat running through the yard. Not that that's not important, but to 911 it is not. 911 is for the safety of individuals and property, period," **Smith** said. The county is working to partner more with neighboring municipalities to put together protocols so that the call center will no longer be responsible for those non-emergency calls. If callers make their way through the automated prompts, it reverts the call back to 911. "I have made a commitment that that loop will close; it has to close. It's about lives, it's about property, a fire or it could be a wreck, those are more important," **Smith** said. "Eventually we're going to deny those kinds of calls with call takers and not take information." **Smith** said the change will happen by the end of this year.

The City of Savannah currently operates Savannah 311 for non-emergency calls related to property or city services and other municipalities might have to look at doing something similar. The county has also explored the possibility of a 24-hour call service where operators would take notes and information and forward it to the correct government entity or organization. "So we're trying to find a better effective way. It's going to cost, but when I look at putting people's lives in jeopardy, that cost is worth the investment," **Smith** said.

Recruitment. In an effort to fill the operator vacancies, the county has stepped up it's recruitment through recruitment videos and a larger social media presence. Applicants remain few in number but the county has seen an uptick in qualified candidates. New hires undergo a minimum nine-month training program, which also includes on-the-job instruction.

Smith said he considers the operators the first line of defense. "I'm not saying that anyone else is not as important, but if that first portal is not as effective and efficient as it should be, everything else fails," he said. "And that would be EMS, fire, law enforcement, marine patrol, because they have to have good data when they walk in to be able to service their calls." A communications officer trainee's pay starts at \$13.52 per hour and at a minimum applicants must have a high school diploma or GED and at least three months of work experience involving customer service, to include some experience dispatching or using a multi-line phone system. Applicants must also pass CritiCall testing, which assesses the skills and aptitudes needed to be a 911 call handler and dispatcher. Completion of various training also comes with pay increases.

Both full-time and part-time positions are available, **Smith** said. Interested applicants can apply online through Chathamcounty.org or even call the county manager's office at 912-652-7869. "I will make sure they get to talk to someone who can talk about the job, what it entails, about county benefits, about salaries. We're trying to take a proactive stance to get people to apply and to come in because they're also good jobs," **Smith** said. "I know they're challenging, but it's not all bad. They've got a great family out there. They're very close, they're very supportive of each other. You have to be in those stressful times. You know, sometimes somebody needs a hug."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 29, 2020

'Cautious' Chatham budget approved \ - Rate rollback for unincorporated areas adopted
Author/Byline: Nick Robertson

Amid an uncertain economic forecast, Chatham commissioners unanimously approved an austere crafted county budget for fiscal year 2021 at their regular biweekly meeting Friday. Because of the ongoing economic turbulence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Chatham's new budget calls for cost-cutting measures - including a hiring freeze and a pause in most new capital-improvement expenditures - in what County Manager **Lee Smith** characterized as a "cautious approach for the next fiscal year." The county's FY 2021 spans from July 1, 2020, to June 30.

Totaling just over \$205 million, Chatham's FY 2021 General Fund Management and Operations budget was passed without increasing the previous year's millage rate of 11.543, although for this budget item county officials declined to apply the rollback rate applicable under Georgia state law as an option for local governments to adjust property taxes to account for inflation. Following requests from several commissioners, the county's \$40.5 million FY 2021 Special Service District (SSD) budget - applicable only to residents of the county's unincorporated areas to fund the Chatham County Police Department, public works and other services typically provided by municipalities - did include a millage-rate rollback from 4.911 to 4.801.

"Ideally, I would love to have been here representing and adopting the rollback rate for [the General Fund Management and Operations budget], and a further reduction in the Special Service District," said Commission Chairman Al Scott, citing projected sales-tax losses as one of several economic plights likely facing Chatham County in the upcoming months. "Given the situation, I was very concerned that if we went down that road, we would jeopardize violating our own policy that we adopted on maintaining a 30% reserve," Scott said, adding that this reserve is intended to avoid entering "a deficit-spending mode that we cannot afford to be in as a county government" if Chatham were to be struck by another economically devastating disaster, such as a hurricane.

While lauding the rollback-rate adoption in the SSD budget, Commissioner Pat Farrell questioned if the county's current taxation structure is fair in regard to the amount of SSD revenue being transferred to the General Fund, an amount he pegged at "roughly \$3.2 million." Farrell said that this arrangement was established decades ago, before the county's unincorporated areas experienced considerable urbanization, and that Chatham is one of only six counties in Georgia that has a separate SSD budget. "I have some qualms about using indirect costs under this scenario," Farrell said, urging the commissioners to reexamine the county's budget structuring during the months ahead. "We may need to ask ourselves if this is indeed a proper way to tax and provide services."

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Commissioner Dean Kicklighter agreed with Farrell while voicing opposition to "double-taxing the residents in the unincorporated area" with the SSD budget. "This is three million paid by the unincorporated area residents, and it would be no different than asking the city of Savannah to contribute \$5 or \$6 million towards the overall budget for the entire county," Kicklighter said.

In response to these concerns, Assistant County Manager Linda Kramer said that staff would be open to reevaluating Chatham's taxation structure in the future with direction from the commissioners. "As we roll into our mid-year budget review, this would be a good time to look at the policy itself and just get more feedback from you all," Kramer said.

Chatham's FY 2021 budget was passed with a stipulation that it be reviewed later this year to possibly amend spending plans depending on economic developments of the upcoming months. "We'll revisit the budget sometime in November or December, when we have a better and fuller understanding and can do some projection on where we think sales tax will land in these, what I call, abnormal conditions," Scott said. "Hopefully we'll be, at that time, within six months of some sort of vaccine and really getting back to the new normal."

Friday's Chatham County Commission meeting was the first held since its chambers within downtown Savannah's Old Courthouse had been refurbished to comply with COVID-19 guidelines, with the dais expanded for increased physical distancing and plexiglass dividers installed between each commissioner's desk. Scott said he expects this coronavirus-prevention arrangement to be maintained into 2021.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 24, 2019

Stranded veteran prompts new 911 protocols for Chatham County

Author/Byline: Tandra Smith

The Chatham County Police and Sheriff's Department now has new protocols put into place regarding 911 calls after a man was stranded for hours on Interstate 95. As of noon Monday, all calls made to the Chatham County 911 Communications Center where an incident involving a locked car poses a major safety concern will have an officer dispatched to them. This includes, but is not limited to, being stranded on a major thoroughfare or having a child or animal locked in the car.

The changes come after a woman called the center Saturday about a man being stranded on the interstate. The Navy veteran, only identified by the name of Paul on a Facebook post by Lisa Quanstrum, was sitting on the side of the road after locking his cell phone, contacts and other personal items in his car.

According to Quanstrum's post, Paul had been on the side of the road for close to two hours before she stopped to help him. Quanstrum called 911 and was informed that nobody would be able to come out and help the stranded man because it would be a liability to unlock car doors for individuals, according to her Facebook post.

Lee Smith, county manager, confirmed that they did receive calls about the stranded man in a press conference Monday. **Smith** said that an agency was not dispatched because the man was located outside of their jurisdiction, Port Wentworth's, to be exact.

Though **Smith** wishes that more information, particularly medical, was communicated more clearly, he said that he really faults no one in this situation. **Smith** said the lack of a response was a combination of where they were and the protocols not being what they should have been.

Smith also said that the changing of the protocols would have occurred whether or not the Quanstrum's Facebook post had gone viral or not. "If we get one call on something, we have it investigated," **Smith** said. "We don't work for ourselves here; we work for our citizens and for 15 million visitors and people that pass through."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
May 25, 2019

No tax hike in county draft budget
Author/Byline: DeAnn Komaneky

No tax rate increases are recommended in the fiscal year 2019-2020 Chatham County budget presented to commissioners for a first look at their regular meeting on Friday.

County Manager **Lee Smith** said the budget was planned using the current millage rate of 11.543 mills in the general fund and 4.99 mills in the special service district, which covers services the county provides in the unincorporated areas including police, public works, engineering, and building safety. The budget for the general fund is listed at \$203 million and \$36 million for the SSD. Commissioners will be meeting one on one with **Smith** and county staff to review the budget before a public hearing is held on June 14. The budget will be adopted on June 28.

The general fund budget proposal includes an almost 7 percent increase. The SSD budget would increase by almost 5 percent. Some highlights in the recommended budget include 21 new full-time and two new part-time positions along with 20 reclassifications and four salary adjustments.

Smith said five of the positions are to create a new department, juvenile indigent defense. The new department will be supervised by the county's indigent defense department head and will use county staff and contract attorneys.

The change is being made due to the high costs associated with indigent defense in Juvenile Court, **Smith** said. Probate Court will have two part-time positions changed to full-time, if the budget as written is approved. The county also plans to set aside \$1 million to use for debt service on the new Trial Court facility.

The new courthouse is estimated to cost \$80 million. The court is in the design phase which should be complete in early 2020. Phase 1, to demolish the old county jail to make way for the building is complete. The site is located at Montgomery Street next to the existing courthouse. The building will provide eight courtrooms for the Superior Court, four for the State Court, a jury selection room and administrative space for judges and staff.

Special Local Option Sales Tax funds from the upcoming SPLOST VII include \$50 million for the new courthouse. Voters will decide whether to approve the one cent sales tax in November. During the upcoming year, county staff will work on developing requests for proposals for the project and finance options. The county also plans on securing a canal clearing contract, estimated at \$250,000 to help Public Works in maintaining the drainage system. A \$250,000 mowing contract for roadways is also planned.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
January 30, 2019

Freight depot demolition OK'd

Author/Byline: Eric Curl

Despite pleas from about a dozen opponents, the Metropolitan Planning Commission recommended approval of a plan to demolish a 90-year-old freight terminal and construct a seven-story apartment complex on the site just outside of downtown Savannah's protected Historic District. Tuesday's vote, which was recommended by MPC staff, came after County Manager **Lee Smith**, speaking as a commissioner, threatened to contact the county attorney in response to some commissioners questioning aspects of the plan he said were outside their authority, including the planned demolition itself and whether potential improvements to the adjacent Savannah-Ogeechee canal were approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "We have to stick to the purview of this board," **Smith** said.

The property owner, WEDP, will next have to present the general development plan to develop 255 market-rate apartments at the site at 703 Louisville Road, along with an accompanying rezoning, to the Savannah City Council for consideration.

The vote on Tuesday came after a consultant's report commissioned by WEDP found that the terminal was not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places due to significant architectural alterations during the past 50 years. The owner's representatives also said that - regardless of whether tax credits would be available - preserving the structure would not be economically feasible due to the building's dilapidated condition and significant design and engineering challenges that would be associated with erecting the project around the depot building located on a brownfield site. "It would cost a lot of money, and it would be a really tall order to get this building back to where it is completely preserved," said WEDP Attorney John Northup III. But local architect Kevin Rose said the building could be saved using a little imagination and vigor, and he questioned the study's findings. "This goes back to a report by a developer that is suiting the developer to reach their own goals," Rose said.

Historic Savannah Foundation President and CEO Daniel Carey noted that MPC staff's recommendation for approval also included six conditions, including the incorporation of some aspects of the building into the project, confirmation on how a 20-percent green-space requirement would be met, and clarification on the type of green infrastructure, low-impact stormwater management techniques that would be used. "There are so many reservations and concerns, it was curious how we ended up with a recommendation for this," Carey said.

Northup said the owners could demolish the building even if it was eligible for the national designation, and they agreed to meet federal preservation standards to mitigate the loss by compiling a photographic archive of the structure. The MPC's vote comes after the Savannah City Council's vote on Nov. 20 to approve WEDP's petition to acquire a 1-acre narrow strip of city-owned land along the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal, which feeds into the Springfield, to

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

support the project. In addition to paying the city \$120,000 for the property, WEDP is to invest a minimum of \$1.5 million to build a retaining wall along the canal, according to the agreement.

City officials said the canal and Canal District will benefit from construction of the new retaining wall, which would be dedicated back to the city upon completion. City Manager Rob Hernandez, a member of the commission, was not present at Tuesday's meeting.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
September 21, 2018

Chatham County receives national award for branding of Chatham County Police Department

Author/Byline: Staff Member

On Sept. 6, the Chatham County Public Information Office accepted the City, County, Communications and Marketing Association Silver Circle award at the Savvy Awards in Milwaukee, WI. Chatham County was a finalist in the new logo, artwork and branding campaign category for the branding of the Chatham County Police Department, said spokeswoman Catherine Glasby. "I am so proud of my Public Information Team, especially Abby Murphy who created all the logos and artwork," she said. "While the Silver Circle award is a 2nd place award, it shows the depth of talent that we have on this team. The winner of the Savvy Award was Clark County Water Reclamation, NV (Las Vegas). Clark County worked with a marketing company and we did everything in house."

Chatham County competed against a number of communities in this category, according to Glasby.

At Friday's county commission meeting, County Manager **Lee Smith** commended team members for their hard work. "In 2018, the County has received national awards from organizations like the Association County Commissioners of Georgia , National Association of Counties , Government Social Media Organization, Facebook and now 3CMA," he said. "It shows the dedication of Team Chatham to deliver high quality services to our citizens. I am very proud of all the members of Team Chatham for their accomplishments."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 8, 2018

Chatham doubles dry trash fee
Author/Byline: Eric Curl

Chatham County is planning on maintaining the existing property tax rate, but residents of the unincorporated county will have to pay double to have their yard waste and bulk items picked up. After his predecessor, Russ Abolt, made failed attempts to implement a similar increase for years, County Manager **Lee Smith**, who took the job in 2014, managed to convince the majority of the Chatham County Commission to raise the annual fee charged for dry-trash collection from \$43 to \$85. On Friday, County Chairman Al Scott joined commissioners James Holmes, Tabitha Odell, Jay Jones and Chester Ellis in approving the increase that **Smith** and Finance Director Amy Davis said was needed to cover most of the costs of the \$2.4 million operation, which includes weekly curbside yard waste collection and monthly bulk item pickup.

A solid waste management fee to use the landfill was also increased by state legislators from \$1 to \$2.50 per ton. Some of the \$1.6 million in additional revenue generated by the landfill fee will be used to cover annual depreciation costs of about \$255,983 needed to replace about \$4 million worth of aging equipment and vehicles, under the approved plan. "Public works was cut so deeply back in 2007 and 2008 that they never caught up," **Smith** said.

Commissioners Patrick Farrell, Dean Kicklighter and Helen Stone voted against the changes after raising concerns about the need for the increase and the impact on residents. Farrell said the county had increased property taxes in previous years and police costs are down after Chatham split from the city in February to form a stand alone department. "I don't see the case for raising it," he said. "I see the case that we reduce it from \$43 to zero personally." The dry trash fee had been increased to \$173 last year to recover the costs of removing debris from Tropical Storm Hermine and Hurricane Matthew the previous fall, but the \$130 increase was to be a temporary measure to restore the reserve funds used for the cleanup.

Kicklighter had suggested using reserve funds to cover the costs of the dry-trash service and equipment since the county now had enough to cover more than three-months of operations, while two months is what is generally recommended. "I think we need to try not putting the fee on the citizens," he said. "Use some of the reserves, buy the capital improvements and see how it shakes out next year." But Ellis and Holmes both said that the three-month reserve amount, which was agreed to as a goal of the commission's, was needed to prepare for more storms. "We need to look at our immediate past," Ellis said. "If we have one, two or more hurricanes like we had with Matthew and Irma, we are going to wind up spending \$30 million up front." The fee increase was approved as part of a revised revenue ordinance for the 2018-2019 fiscal year, which begins in July. The proposed budget maintains the existing property tax rate for the county and Special Service District, which pays for services provided outside Chatham's municipalities. The commission is expected to adopt the budget on June 22.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
February 10, 2018

**CHATHAM TO REPAY CITY FOR PAST POLICE WORK\ - \$2.1M TRANSFER
MARKS LATEST STEP AWAY FROM JOINT DEPARTMENT**

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

The Chatham County Commission on Friday authorized staff to cut a \$2.1 million check to the city of Savannah for police services provided in the past.

The back payment, which was approved by both entities in advance of the Feb. 1 split of the Savannah-Chatham police department, is part of an ongoing reconciliation effort between the two governments, County Manager **Lee Smith** said. Briefly addressing the payment after the commission's meeting Friday, Smith said he expects any remaining vehicles and equipment from the joint department to be returned to their respective owners in the next couple of weeks. In addition, he said, county staff have nearly finished installing the necessary infrastructure at the county-owned precinct on Whitmarsh Island and he reported that Chatham officers will begin occupying the Islands Precinct in the next week or two.

It's now been a little more than a week since the two governments resumed sole responsibility for policing their own jurisdictions, and the county manager said things are picking up in unincorporated Chatham's reformed police department. The county manager told the commission that 15 sworn officers are preparing to join the Chatham County Police Department's ranks, with an additional 70 or 80 recruits waiting in the queue. "It's moving," he said Friday.

Meanwhile, as the county works to put the people and equipment in place to run the standalone department, other adjustments are being made to the county's code of ordinances to reflect the Chatham County Police Department's return. The commission held a second and final reading Friday of two ordinance amendments that replace references to the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department in the revenue ordinance and other code sections with "Chatham County Police Department." A similar revision to the Chatham County Speed Zone ordinance will be up for second reading at the commission's next meeting.

In other business Friday:

- **Smith** reported that the county is hoping to raise funds from the private sector to purchase a \$250,000 digital scoreboard for Memorial Stadium. Smith added that the county is continuing its master plan for recreation in the community, an effort that is expected to include cooperation from local municipalities and the Savannah-Chatham school board. Commission Chairman Al Scott said the findings in the recreation master plan will be a driver in sales tax spending moving forward.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
December 30, 2017

**CHATHAM DOWNPLAYS POTENTIAL LANDFILL RELEASES - ARSENIC,
COBALT FOUND AT CHEVIS ROAD, SHARON PARK**

Author/Byline: Mary Landers

Routine monitoring of two Chatham County landfills has raised a concern about heavy metals leaking into groundwater at Chevis Road and Sharon Park. Chatham County advertised its findings as public notices in the Savannah Morning News in early November. "Arsenic has been detected in groundwater at levels significantly above background concentrations and above Georgia EPD-approved groundwater protection standards," the notice for Chevis Road Landfill reads. "Metals have been detected in groundwater at levels statistically significant above background concentrations and above Georgia EPD-approved groundwater protection standards," the notice for Sharon Park Road Landfill reads. The metals detected at Sharon Park were arsenic and cobalt, with readings of up to five times the limit for arsenic there.

Chatham County Manager **Lee Smith** said the county doesn't see a public health concern because elevated levels of either metals were detected in only two of a dozen monitoring wells at Chevis and two of 14 such wells at Sharon Park. The county's environmental consultant at both sites since 2008, Advanced Environmental Management, wrote in its report for Chevis Road Landfill that "Arsenic appears to be naturally occurring in the soils at this facility" and that "turbidity is at least partially influencing arsenic detections." AEM is "ascertaining where to put additional wells" to determine where the contamination is coming from at both sites. "If it is the landfill then mitigation will be required," **Smith** said.

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division's Jeff Cown said last month his agency had not yet confirmed the release, despite the fact that the sampling occurred in March. EPD confirmation is what triggers the requirement for the public notice. Like **Smith** and AEM, he noted there are high levels of naturally occurring arsenic in Chatham County. "We want to inform the public. We don't want to scare the public," said Cown, chief of the land protection branch for the Georgia EPD.

The public notification requirement came about with a 2016 law requiring landfills to notify local authorities of the release of contaminants "dangerous to human health." The legislation was prompted by the releases at Broadhurst Landfill in Jesup where large quantities of coal ash were shipped in and local residents didn't know about the releases from the landfill until well after the fact. The law requires municipal solid waste landfills to notify local governing authorities of the city and county where the landfill is located if there is a release of a contaminant that is likely to pose a danger to human health. It doesn't specify which contaminants fall into that category. The law also requires notice in a local newspaper within 14 days of "confirmation of the release by EPD."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Smith said that while the lack of that EPD confirmation meant the county was not obligated to publish the notice he wanted to do so to be proactive. "We are getting ahead of the curve so we don't wait six to nine months for this to be exacerbated," he said. **Smith** said the new law was meant to target coal ash but has unintended consequences for other landfills. He expects to see changes to the law in the upcoming legislative session.

But Altamaha Riverkeeper Jen Hilburn called for continued notification. "This is another of many examples of leaks of toxic heavy metals from improperly stored contaminants. With coal ash being moved around for proper storage we must move towards placing all contaminants, coal ash and more, in lined and capped facilities away from our waterways," said Altamaha Riverkeeper Jen Hilburn. "A little arsenic here, a little thallium there, a little toxaphene here a little benzene there....when contaminants are regularly leaking at statistically significant levels, we all suffer as these pile up in our rivers, in our drinking water supply. Death by a thousand cuts is still death."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
November 29, 2017

**CITY SEEKING \$6 MILLION POLICE REIMBURSEMENT FROM COUNTY -
ALDERMAN ANTICIPATES MATTER WILL END UP IN COURT**

Author/Byline: Eric Curl

The city of Savannah is still attempting to recover more than \$6 million from Chatham County for Savannah-Chatham police costs, as the two governments prepare to end the merger and create their own police departments, according to officials. But the matter will not likely be resolved before the city adopts its 2018 budget, said Savannah Alderman Julian Miller. "That will probably drag on for a couple years," Miller said. "I anticipate it will end up in court."

However, County Commission Chairman Al Scott said he is not sure there is a dispute in a texted response to an interview request Tuesday and he suggested the reporter talk to County Manager **Lee Smith** about the issue. An attempt to arrange an interview with **Smith** on Tuesday through a county spokesperson was unsuccessful.

The city expects to be reimbursed \$3.6 million by Chatham County for police costs next year, according to the preliminary 2018 budget released last week. But that amount is to fund a Counter Narcotics Team position and for merged police services to continue through January, according to city spokesperson Michelle Gavin. The city is still owed about \$2.3 million for 2016 police costs and an additional \$4 million above the 2017 budgeted amount, Gavin said. The reimbursement amounts are based on the findings of an operations study by Berkshire Advisors that was funded by both governments to provide a fair funding formula. But Chatham officials rejected the consultant's findings, which they said were flawed, and refused to adopt the study's recommendations. In response, the City Council voted in July to end the police merger on Feb. 1.

Meanwhile, City Manager Rob Hernandez is proposing more than \$12.7 million in spending reductions in the city's 2018 budget, unless alternative revenue sources such as a proposed fire fee or tax rate increase are adopted to cover projected shortfalls. But the disputed police reimbursements would not fix the revenue deficits city staffers are projecting for 2018 and beyond, even if the city were able to reach an agreement before the end of the year, Miller said. "You have to be careful of taking a one-time revenue and putting it in a budget," he said. "A budget revenue needs to be recurring." Police-related expenses in the proposed 2018 budget drop by about \$9.2 million to about \$56.8 million next year as a result of the department split, but that cost does not include the consultant's recommendations that the City Council has said it wants to implement in order to improve emergency response times. Those recommendations include 12 more positions for a total of 620 police employees, in addition to more vehicles, at an additional cost of almost \$1.4 million, according to an October staff report. Police Chief Joseph Lumpkin has requested an even larger department comprised of 650 employees, with 555 sworn officers, which the city estimated would increase costs by about \$3.8 million.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith*****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)***

The city's preliminary budget assumes Savannah will continue to operate the regional 911 center at a deficit with no additional funding support from either Chatham or participating municipalities, requiring an almost \$2.3 million subsidy from the general fund - an increase of \$657,946 over 2017, according to Hernandez's budget report. The county has expressed its intent to assume operations in July next year and to cover any funding deficits retroactive to Jan. 1, 2018, but the arrangement is tied to the settlement of the disputed issues regarding unincorporated area law enforcement services, Hernandez said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
October 28, 2017

JAIL GETS LAST-MINUTE HEALTH CONTRACT \ SHERIFF, COMMISSION CHAIRMAN HAMMER OUT DEAL FEW HOURS BEFORE ITS EXPIRATION

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

With just hours left to go before it was set to vacate the facility, Atlanta-based inmate health services provider CorrectHealth was awarded a contract Friday to continue providing health care at the Chatham County jail. On Friday afternoon, Sheriff John Wilcher reported that he was able to work with Chatham County Commission Chairman Al Scott to draw up the extended contract with the company, which will continue through the June 30, 2018, end of the current fiscal year. Wilcher said he hand delivered the document to the chairman just before 4 p.m.

The sheriff said now that the contract is in place, county staff will be posting a request for proposals for inmate health services and take bids for Fiscal Year 2019, which starts July 1, 2018. "It's just a continuation of the contract, it's the same rate as the old contract," the chairman confirmed Friday. He added the document will also have to be approved by the rest of the commission. Assuming the contract is confirmed by the other commissioners, Friday's agreement with CorrectHealth brings to an end a dramatic series of negotiations over inmate health care at the Chatham County jail.

In a summary of the talks provided to the commission last week, County Manager **Lee Smith** said Chatham staffers kicked off the renegotiation efforts with CorrectHealth early this year, and that they continued even after the county commission voted to enter into a new contract with the company on Oct. 6. But by the following week, **Smith** said, he made an executive decision not to renew the company's contract based on a "lack of response, budget and impending deadlines, but more importantly the legal requirements to ensure health care at the detention center."

Smith wrote that he immediately contacted representatives of Vienna, Va.-based Centurion Inc., to see if they could take up the contract on an emergency basis until the county could re-advertise the service and select a new inmate health services provider. The company indicated that it could, and the county commission narrowly approved the emergency contract at its meeting Oct. 20. Even with that approval, however, it was unclear in the days leading up to Friday's down-to-the-wire contract whether Chatham County officials would have a company in place to provide health care to inmates at week's end.

Although the Chatham County Commission vote was for Centurion to take up health care services beginning today, a series of letters sent back and forth in the days after that vote indicated that, despite its best efforts, the new company would not be in place by the time CorrectHealth had vacated. In a Tuesday letter to the commission and the sheriff, **Smith** wrote that he had requested that CorrectHealth remain in place through mid-November to assist in the transition, but CorrectHealth President Dr. Carlo Musso firmly declined. Musso wrote, in a letter

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

sent in response to **Smith's** request, that the county manager had misrepresented to the county commission the facts about previous efforts to come to new terms over his contract with the county, and he was unwilling to continue his contract past Oct. 27. "When I initially read your request to extend our contract, I was inclined to agree to continue to provide services, as long as necessary, given the prevailing interests of the health care needs of the inmates at the CCDC and the needs of the Sheriff's Office," Musso wrote. "We are simply unable and unwilling to extend our relationship with Chatham County, as you have repeatedly and unnecessarily disparaged our reputation and the quality health care services we provide. We simply have no trust in the honesty or integrity of your office. Our last day will remain Oct. 27, 2017 for which full payment will be demanded."

County spokeswoman Catherine Glasby did not respond to repeated requests for comment on the charges levied by agents of CorrectHealth or on the status of the inmate health care contract this week. The sheriff, however, said the new contract with CorrectHealth is basically an extension of the company's previous contract at a monthly cost of just less than \$600,000. And unlike the previous contract, which was between the Chatham County Commission and CorrectHealth, Wilcher said the new version also includes him. "The chairman and I ... sat down and came to an agreement," Wilcher said. "It's the same contract from last year. Everything should go status quo. I'm happy with it."

Moving forward, the sheriff said CorrectHealth has agreed to pursue accreditation under the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, a designation he expects they'll receive by April.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
October 19, 2017

SHERIFF CRITICIZES EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE CONTRACT FOR HEALTH CARE AT JAIL

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

Although he said he's made a point of not involving himself in ongoing negotiations, Chatham County Sheriff John Wilcher also made it known this week he isn't pleased with the process other county officials are using to contract for inmate health services at the county jail.

On Tuesday, the sheriff fired off a pair of letters to inform Chatham County Manager **Lee Smith** and Commission Chairman Al Scott that he disagrees with the county's use of emergency procurement procedures to hire Vienna, Va.-based Centurion Healthcare to take up the inmate health services contract. Wilcher also accused the county manager of keeping him in the dark about the negotiations with the company and of espousing a "cavalier attitude" about the work being done at the jail. "After considerable personal reflection and discussion with my senior management in the sheriff's office, I would like to let you know that I am greatly troubled by the way the county staff has gone about trying to micromanage a critical function in my jail operation," Wilcher wrote in his letter **Smith**. "It is clear that you are trying to run the county taxpayer's detention center from Bull Street, and doing so without the first bit of medical and/or law enforcement experience. You have consistently failed and refused to include me in the discussions, and have acted with disrespect towards the office I hold and with total disregard of the hard work and tireless efforts of my staff."

Asked Wednesday for comment, county spokeswoman Catherine Glasby said **Smith** would not be available to discuss the sheriff's accusations until after the county commission meets Friday. The agenda for that meeting indicates the commission is slated to discuss inmate health services, but no other details were available. Staff reports associated with the discussion weren't expected until "later in the week."

The announcement Monday that the county was negotiating with Centurion marked a change in direction for the inmate health services contract. Up until last week, county administrators had been in talks with the current provider, CorrectHealth of Atlanta, to continue providing the service for a second year. But those negotiations were ultimately unsuccessful and, the press release distributed Monday said, "Chatham County staff, the County Attorney, Sheriff John T. Wilcher, and Correct Health mutually decided not to extend or renew the contract."

Wilcher, however, disputes that he was involved in the decision to end the negotiations with CorrectHealth. In his letter to Scott, the sheriff wrote that he thought a new contract with the Atlanta company was forthcoming - until he was notified it wasn't. "Imagine my surprise when ... I received notification of the firing of CorrectHealth," Wilcher wrote. "I have not interfered in any of the issues that have taken place during the negotiations and have stayed out of it simply to allow for the county as the client to do what they do best." Reached by phone Wednesday, the

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith*****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)***

sheriff said he plans to continue to stay out of the talks. But as the elected official charged with overseeing the jail's day-to-day operations, Wilcher said he wants to be kept in the loop on the progress of the talks and on the plans of any company hired to do business at the jail. The sheriff added that he won't allow Centurion staff to operate without first conducting background checks and polygraph tests. "I just want to make sure that when they do the contract I am covered with the proper medical care for the inmates and if not the same staffing, then more staffing," he said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
September 21, 2017

COUNTY APPROVES PURCHASES TOWARD NEW POLICE DEPARTMENT\ - NEW POLICE CARS, SALARIES ON DOCKET FOR FRIDAY'S COMMISSION MEETING

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

Chatham County staffers have gotten the green light to make the purchases and hires necessary to reestablish a standalone county police department. And based on some of the expenses already incurred, it would no longer be feasible for Chatham officials to continue to negotiate with their counterparts at the city of Savannah to maintain a joint Savannah-Chatham police department, County Manager **Lee Smith** said in a telephone interview Wednesday.

To meet the Feb. 1, 2018, deadline set by the Savannah City Council in a July vote to dissolve the Savannah-Chatham police department, the county commission has already agreed to make purchases that, if the merged department were to be salvaged, would no longer be usable, **Smith** said. In addition, the county manager said, staffers have received bids for other equipment and services, and completed the design of the official seal and badge for the reformed Chatham County Police Department. "I've been giving marching orders," **Smith** said. "We've already sought bids for uniforms, we've chosen the badges, the seals, the colors of the uniforms (and) the car decals. We've got the bids back for weapons we have to purchase - guns, tasers - so we'll be bringing those budget amendments. You'll probably see them at every (commission) meeting or every other meeting from now until winter."

One of those budget requests is going before the commission Friday. Staffers are recommending that commissioners approve the purchase of 20 new Ford Explorer Police Interceptors from Hardeeville, S.C.-based O.C. Welch Ford-Lincoln at a cost of \$538,500. In a memo submitted to the commission along with its agenda for Friday's meeting, Fleet Operations Director Calvin Turner said he was suggesting the purchase because the county police department has "an immediate need for police pursuit vehicles to establish and handle patrolling the unincorporated areas of Chatham County." "In order to have the vehicles ready to patrol, Staff contacted several Ford dealerships to obtain pricing information and availability," Turner wrote. "O.C. Welch confirmed to staff that he has six ... vehicles on the lot which are available for immediate delivery and is expecting the balance to be shipped any day." If approved by the commission Friday, the vehicles would be added to the growing tab for the county police department.

The commission on Sept. 8 approved the purchase of a new phone system and radios for the Chatham County Police Department at a combined cost of more than \$400,000. The board also voted earlier this month to amend its budget for police services and create three new information and communication services positions for the police department. According to a budget amendment on the agenda for Friday's meeting, those ICS positions are expected to cost \$247,900 in the current fiscal year.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

In the meantime, staffers reported at the commission's meeting two weeks ago that more than 100 applications for various positions in the department had been received and return offers had been extended to the 29 officers on the county retirement plan who now work for the Savannah-Chatham department.

And **Smith** said Wednesday the search firm Stanton Chase has already begun interviewing candidates from across the state and nation to lead the department as chief. "This is a big deal," he said. "It sounds very easy to do this, but there are parts that are very complicated, like getting a chief on this fall and two assistant chiefs. ... (But) since the city gave us the February deadline it's what we have to do."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 25, 2017

**ACTION DEMANDED ON 'URGENT' PROBLEMS\ - JUDGE: BATHROOM
OVERFLOW, COLD TEMPS MAKE WORK DIFFICULT**

Author/Byline: Jan Skutch

A Chatham County Superior Court judge has blasted "chronic, unresponsive management" at the county's aging courthouse and demanded, for her fellow judges, that conditions there be given "urgent priority." Judge Louisa Abbot directed her ire at two specific conditions - a malfunctioning air-conditioning and heating system, and a repeatedly overflowing bathroom in an office that houses judges' staff attorneys - at the J. Tom Coleman Courthouse on Montgomery Street. "Surely such conditions would not be allowed to exist in your offices," Abbot wrote in a Tuesday letter to Chatham County Commission Chairman Al Scott and his fellow commissioners. "The judges - on behalf of jurors, employees, and all other users of this building, of this county building - demand that you make the health and comfort of the public and your employees an urgent priority."

Abbot's action was sparked by frigid courtroom conditions for jurors during a weeklong trial for serial rapist Trevon Hendrix this month. Attached to Abbot's letter was a second letter signed by the 14 jurors in the Hendrix case complaining of Courtroom 2-A being "unbearably cold for much of the week. At one point, the temperature was 60 degrees and it rarely grew much warmer," they said. "The inability of the county to have an operating, functional air conditioner made our jury service in a most serious case all the more difficult. It is a disservice to citizens who have jury service, to the court staff and other court personnel and to all others who have to come to the J. Tom Coleman building. "We call upon you as the elected leaders of our county to investigate this matter and treat it as urgent to find a lasting solution immediately so that other citizens are not subject to adverse conditions while serving as jurors." Abbot said she asked the jurors to sign the letter "because jurors and members of the public have had to suffer dramatic temperature shifts for months."

COUNTY'S RESPONSE

County Manager **Lee Smith** said in an email response to Abbot on Wednesday that the county is addressing courthouse problems. "We have been looking at many of these issues and addressing as our budget will allow and developing a long-term plan for the full renovation of the facility as well as addressing the construction of a new trial court facility. Investment in the present facility has to be examined as we plan for the future facility in cooperation with new facility ensuring that taxpayer funds are used wisely." "Your input is always wanted. Communication with myself, my office and my management team is paramount in advance to properly address issues such as these in a timely manner. ... My door has always been open to the judiciary and will continue to be."

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

CONTINUING CONCERNS

But Abbot's concerns were just the latest complaints about ongoing problems at the courthouse since it was put in service in 1978. Chatham County renovation efforts at the courthouse to date have bypassed trial floors on the second and fourth trial floors where the air-conditioning/heating systems have frequently been the target of complaints. It leaves some floors of the six-story courthouse too cold, others too hot. State Court Chief Judge H. Gregory Fowler said that on Nov. 14, he sent jurors in a criminal case home "because there was no heat" in the courtroom he recalled being between 54 and 64 degrees. "It happens often enough (to) where it is irritating," Fowler said. "I am sorry about this and I apologize," Abbot told the jurors who arrived in court on June 7 for the Hendrix case to find it 60 degrees. "I am a public servant. I do not like to have anyone uncomfortable. In particular, I don't like to for you all to be uncomfortable. "It's unfair. This is your courthouse. You pay for this courthouse, you and your, you know, ancestors. But we pay for the maintenance of it." She took care to tell jurors she was not criticizing the maintenance department employees "because they have been, personally, extremely attentive and very concerned."

In her letter to Scott, Abbot especially singled out Jack Ingram (the senior building maintenance supervisor is actually Climmie Ancrum) and Solomon Roberts (building maintenance mechanic) for being "unfailingly attentive" to her concerns. "So you know, I'm a Southerner. I don't like cold. So I'm doing everything I can," she told jurors. And, she said, a letter from the jurors to the county commission "I think (will) get their attention far more that I can. The power of citizenry is, thank goodness, still powerful." Such a letter "would make each one of (the commissioners) feel personally responsible for the people who come into this building every day and who are doing serious business ..."

ABBOT TO SCOTT

In her letter to Scott, Abbot said those using the courthouse "have had to suffer dramatic temperatures shifts for months. "The second floor is icy; the fourth floor is broiling. The new first floor courtroom is inoperable due to HVAC problems. To no avail, judges have conveyed our growing dismay about the temperatures," she wrote. "Given the chronic unresponsiveness of management," Abbot contacted Assistant County Attorney Jennifer Burns for help and was told by a county employee, Anthony Stephens (assistant building maintenance and operations superintendent), that "all he had to do was to 'unlock' the thermostats which had previously been locked so that no one could alter the temperature." She called that "shocking news," questioning why, if it was so simple, did the judges have to make repeated complaints about the temperatures? "Why were the thermostats ever locked anyway?" she asked, adding that it "shows something is seriously amiss, not only the temperature but also the utter lack of communication."

Abbot then turned her irritation to the restroom on the fourth floor where eight staff attorneys, formerly law clerks, share a suite. "For several years the toilet in the staff attorney restroom has been overflowing and causing flooding, soaking carpets, causing noxious odors and making work conditions intolerable," Abbot wrote. Those conditions have sickened staff attorneys from "chemicals used futilely to try and disinfect the area. One attorney had to have foot surgery after walking through the infected water."

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Efforts by fellow Superior Court Judge John E. Morse Jr. to explain the seriousness of health conditions and the inconvenience to Stephens have not been followed up on as promised, she said, adding that, "Nearly two weeks have now passed with the usual lack of communication." "The toilet continues to overflow, frequently spontaneously, belying the blame placed on the staff attorneys by maintenance," she wrote. "The alternate restroom in the hallway has the same problem so the staff have no other options."

SMITH'S RESPONSE TO ABBOT LETTER

Judge Abbot,

I am in receipt of your letter reference conditions in the courthouse. Your input is always wanted.

Communication with myself, my office or my management team is paramount in advance to properly address issues such as these in a timely manner. We have been looking at many of these issues and addressing as our budget will allow and developing a long term plan for the full renovation of the facility as well addressing the construction of a new trial court facility.

Investment in the present facility has to be examined as we plan for the future facility in cooperation with new facility ensuring that taxpayer funds are used wisely.

Please feel free at anytime to contact me for discussions reference your concerns as they are important to Chatham County and myself. My door has always been open to the judiciary and will continue to be.

Thanks for your input and we look forward to improving the facility for all in Chatham County and thank you for your dedication and service to the citizens of our County.

Respectfully,

Lee Smith

County Manager

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 16, 2017

COUNTY STARES DOWN TOUGH BUDGET CHOICES\ - OFFICIALS WEIGH REQUESTS ON TOP OF \$273M WITHOUT CLEAR WAY TO PAY FOR IT ALL

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

The requests have been submitted and most of the recommendations are in, so now it's down to the Chatham County Commission to decide what will get funding and what won't in their upcoming 2017-2018 budget. Commissioners are slated to adopt the budget and set their millage rates when they convene for their next meeting, June 23, leaving them just one more week to weigh final petitions from department heads, community organizations and their constituents. As it stands, they have a lot to consider. Along with the combined \$273 million budget, tax rates and fees recommended by County Manager **Lee Smith** at the beginning of the month, county department heads and local nonprofit organizations during the past couple of weeks have laid out requests for extra funding to cover new staff, equipment, programs and space they say will be necessary to do their work in the upcoming fiscal year. Based on the projected revenue from property taxes and other fees, however, the county commission won't be able to pay for it all.

During a public hearing Friday on the proposed millage rates for the county-wide maintenance and operations fund, the unincorporated Special Service District and the Chatham Area Transit service district, Commission Chairman Al Scott said that while the county as a whole has experienced some growth during the past year, the unincorporated county has been relatively stagnant.

SPECIAL SERVICE DISTRICT

In the worst-case scenario proposed by county staffers earlier this month, the commission would need to levy a 1.6-mill increase to the property tax charged to taxpayers in unincorporated Chatham County - the Special Service District - from 4.13 mills to 5.73. All of this additional revenue would cover rising costs for the joint Savannah-Chatham police department as outlined in a recent study on the department's operations. The police study, which was jointly funded for \$109,000 by the city and county last spring, determined the county's share of police costs moving forward had increased by about \$3 million to more than \$17 million a year. In addition, the report indicated that Chatham County owed \$5 million to Savannah for police costs dating back to Jan. 1, 2016. Addressing the unincorporated tax rate during the one of the hearings on the millage Thursday, Gayla Reffner, a resident of the county's 6th District, said she isn't opposed to paying her share for services but only if she receives those services, and so far, she isn't. Despite complaints about illegal shooting ranges and other problems near her property, Reffner said she hasn't received a satisfactory response from the police department. "I think it's unfair you're taxing us for something we're not getting," she said.

As of Thursday, however, it no longer appeared that all of the additional tax revenue will be necessary. **Smith** said after the budget workshop Thursday staff has already found errors in the study that drop the cost of the back-payment to the city by \$1 million. He said staff will continue

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

to comb through the study during the next week to determine if other adjustments are needed before final adoption of the budget. "We will make a recommendation next week but this board is going to have to decide," **Smith** said, adding that if the commission opts to budget below what was recommended in the study, the county and city will have to head to the bargaining table again to discuss the costs before the Savannah City Council adopts its own budget in December.

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS BUDGET

Meanwhile, the county is proposing to maintain the property tax rate charged to taxpayers countywide at 11.543 mills. This is the same millage levied in the past two budget years, Scott said, but because of growth in the local tax digest - built up by new development in west Chatham and increasing property values - it is expected to bring in additional revenues. According to the county manager's summary of the proposed budget, the bulk of these additional revenues will cover costs to continue to operate Chatham Area Transit's Paratransit program from one end of the county to the other. The cost for Paratransit is expected to climb by 85 percent in the upcoming budget, from less than \$2.7 million to more than \$5.1 million. "Our demand is going to grow as our population ages," said CAT's Chief Financial Officer Terri Harrison Thursday, despite efforts to cut costs by engaging new scheduling software, applying for grants and encouraging Paratransit riders to use other modes of public transportation. The county is only required to provide the program within CAT's service district, but the commission decided years ago to continue to provide Paratransit service county-wide, regardless of whether the cities participate. The county manager's budget indicates that if the commission opts to continue to operate Paratransit countywide, it could recoup some of the costs by expanding the CAT service district to include all areas of Chatham County not currently paying for the transportation system's service.

CAT SERVICE DISTRICT

In the upcoming fiscal year, CAT's is requesting that the county commission set a millage rate for the transit district at 1.15 mills - an increase of 0.15 mills over the district's current tax rate. Harrison said the hope is that the increase will bring in another \$1.5 million in revenues for CAT, to prevent the need to cut services or staffing.

DRY TRASH FEES

Along with the recommended millage rates, Chatham County staff have recommended a temporary increase to the annual \$43 dry trash fee paid by unincorporated residents. The fee, which could amount to a two-time additional charge of \$100 or a one-time additional charge of about \$130, is designed to help the county recover some of its emergency reserve fund after last year's two tropical storms.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
April 23, 2017

INTERNAL AUDIT FINDS RISK IN CHATHAM'S PUBLIC WORKS' PAYROLL RECORDS\ - COMP TIME CALCULATIONS FALL SHORT OF FEDERAL STANDARDS, ADD UP TO \$17,000

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

Internal auditors reviewing the payroll system at Chatham County Public Works recently discovered deficiencies that put the department at odds with federal employment standards. According to an audit report produced by the county in response to a request under the Georgia Open Records Act, some public works employees built up compensatory time in excess of what local government employees are allowed to earn under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act. The internal audit, which reviewed the public works department's payroll from July 2014 to July 2016, was conducted after employees alerted the county to discrepancies between the compensatory time tracked by the department's payroll system and its timekeeping system.

Jeannie Alday, director of Chatham County's internal audit department, said that since auditors reviewed the system most of the findings have been addressed. She said similar issues should be nullified once the county implements a new, automated timekeeping system for all departments. Alday said county officials are reviewing vendors for that automated system now.

A fact sheet provided by the U.S. Department of Labor indicates that federal regulations allow for state or local government agencies to grant their employees comp time in lieu of overtime pay in some cases. Comp time is capped at 480 hours for public safety and seasonal personnel and at 240 hours for all other government employees, including public works. In Chatham County, public works is responsible for maintenance of a variety of county properties, including its roads and bridges, storm drains and solid waste drop-off centers. Throughout 2015, the March 24 internal audit report says, the public works department kept records of comp time in an "off-book," rather than in the official payroll system. The result, the document says, is the two records were never reconciled, and they began to show different comp time balances over time. "The off-book record was not compliant with (Fair Labor Standards Act) limitations on the maximum accrual of 240 hours of compensatory time," the audit report says, "and some employees had accrued significantly higher balances." The report says that as a result of the incorrect timekeeping, about one-third of public works employees were overpaid, costing the county more than \$17,000. Another third of public works employees were underpaid by nearly \$10,000. Two-thirds of employees in the public works department had their comp time or overtime incorrectly calculated and 55 percent of those who were granted comp time weren't eligible to receive it. Using a recently implemented audit rating scale, in which 1 reflects a perfect score and 5 indicates serious problems, the county's internal auditors gave the public works department's payroll system a 4-, or just above the bottom of the scale.

Addressing the audit recently, County Manager **Lee Smith** said he wasn't all that surprised by the findings in public works, where employees often work long hours outside of a typical shift.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Those odd hours, he said, coupled with payroll clerks who aren't fully trained in federal labor standards, can cause some of the problems the internal audit revealed. "First of all, those folks worked and they are due that time, so what we're doing is paying those out. I would say those 99 percent have been corrected and now we have internal auditing and ensuring those people are doing what they're supposed to do," **Smith** said. "Exempt, non-exempt employees, that can be confusing. We have had to back up and try to bring everybody up to date, and say this is how you're classified. It's not that we want to hurt anybody, we just have to be legal."

In the case of those employees who were overpaid, **Smith** reported that the county would not seek back payment. It was not the fault of those employees, he said, that their time was miscalculated.

'DIDN'T HAVE THE TRAINING'

One finding listed by auditors in the report was incorrect comp time balance sheets. Records kept by the public works department were different from those maintained by Chatham County's human resources department. To address this problem, management in public works, with assistance from human resources, will improve its efforts to meet Fair Labor Standards by retraining supervisors, superintendents and managers in comp time requirements. The reports says management will also periodically monitor comp time usage and balances. In addition, auditors found that manual comp time calculations allowed for some employees to use comp time or get overtime pay when it hadn't been earned. Auditors wrote that because the department's practices weren't in compliance with the Fair Labor Standards Act, the county was at risk of violating federal labor laws and incurring fines and penalties.

Rather than provide comment for this article, representatives of the U.S. Department of Labor's regional office in Atlanta provided fact sheets about the agency's process for reviewing FLSA violations. According to those sheets, the Department of Labor has the authority to recover back wages from employers and assess civil penalties. In especially egregious cases, the department can litigate or even prosecute employers found to willfully violate federal employment requirements.

But Alday said in the case of Chatham County Public Works, these actions won't be necessary. The county has already corrected the areas of non-compliance, she said, and there's no evidence that any of the issues found were intentional. "I wouldn't consider it a serious issue," she said. "It wasn't a malicious thing. They weren't aware because they didn't have the training. ... I think definitely this is something that has been addressed by management. ... I have every confidence they have a handle on it now, they understand it and will do some formal training pretty soon."

Internal auditors are scheduled to conduct a follow up review of the payroll system in public works in late July.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
January 11, 2017

MPC SWEARS IN MEMBERS

Author/Byline: Savannah Morning News

Members of the 2017 Metropolitan Planning Commission were sworn-in on Tuesday by Chatham County Superior Court Judge John Morse before their first meeting of the year.

The 14-member board is chaired by Tanya Milton and is responsible for development, urban and transportation planning, historic preservation and much more in the Savannah community.

2017 commissioners are:

Tanya Milton, James Overton, Joseph Welch, George Woods, Shedrick Coleman, Travis Coles, Ellison Cook, Joseph Ervin, Rob Hernandez, Timothy Mackey, Lacy Manigault, **Lee Smith**, Linder Suthers, and Tom Woiwode.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
February 28, 2016

DA: No crime discovered in alderman's gun buyback effort

Author/Byline: Jan Skutch

Chatham County District Attorney Meg Heap says her review of a gun buyback program did not reveal any evidence of "criminal wrongdoing" by Savannah Alderman Van Johnson in connection with a grassroots program here. "Upon review of the GBI investigative report in this matter, I concur with the GBI's assessment that there is no evidence of criminal wrongdoing by Mr. Johnson," Heap said in a one-paragraph letter to GBI officials in Statesboro. Heap's findings, supported by a GBI review she requested last summer, puts to rest a probe of alleged irregularities in the handling of guns from a Savannah gun buyback initiative.

Heap sought the GBI review after discussions with County Manager **Lee Smith**, who made a formal request for a "criminal investigation into the allegation" involving the nonprofit Savannah Youth City Inc. "gun buyback program, process of buyback, securing of firearms, etc." The request, and Heap's conclusion, were sent to GBI Agent-in-Charge Bill Bodrey in Statesboro.

Johnson said Tuesday that his intentions "were clear and they were pure and within the confines of the law. "We have a significant problem in our community that guns are being used by people who should not have them," he said. "They need to get rid of them. ... The most important thing is to get the guns off the streets before they hurt someone." "I'm still collecting them," Johnson said in what he called "a direct attempt to be able to get some of these guns off our streets." **Smith's** request identified "circumstances surrounding the surrendered firearms collected by Savannah City Youth Inc.'s program." "The firearms were surrendered to Chatham-Savannah Counter Narcotics Team to be secured while the matter is being investigated."

"We're doing safekeeping," **Smith** said during a news conference. "We had concerns about it, and I had gotten calls in my office. I had worked with CNT and said to them, I think for the safety of the public, the best thing that could happen ... (was that) CNT hold those (and) inventory them."

Johnson announced the gun buyback program in late November 2016, in concert with the nonprofit. He called it a local gun effort to prevent local gun violence in Savannah and unincorporated Chatham County where there were 280 aggravated assaults with a gun in 2016. That same year, the Savannah-Chatham police recovered 1,092 guns, according to department officials. "Each one of those guns represents a minimum of one life that can be taken if it's in the wrong hands," Johnson said at the time.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News
December 5, 2015

**CHATHAM SELLS WATER SYSTEM\ - \$6.9M WILL HELP STAVE OFF
BANKRUPTCY, HELP WITH REPAIRS**

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

Chatham County has put an end to its public water system. In an 8-1 vote Friday, the Chatham County Commission approved a purchase agreement with Savannah-based Water Utility Management, doing business as Chatham Water Utility, for the majority of the water system - all but the systems at Little Neck Road and Modena Island. The private company will buy the system for about \$6.9 million. The agreement also sets the company up to manage the county's sewer system for about 10 percent of its revenues. The county was unable to sell the sewer system because the city of Savannah treats wastewater from unincorporated Chatham and won't accept it from a private vendor.

With the cash from the water system's sale, the county intends to make repairs to the sewer system, which County Manager **Lee Smith** said is decades behind on its maintenance schedule. **Smith** has said Chatham's water/sewer fund has been operating at a loss for years and would have gone bankrupt within the next two years. The contract requires Water Utility Management to offer positions to county staff affected by the sale and to maintain current rates for three years.

But the contract also left some unknowns. Commissioners Dean Kicklighter and Helen Stone pointed out that with the sale, the cities of Savannah and Pooler, which have provided a backup water supply for customers of the Runaway Point and Hunter's Ridge systems, will no longer do so. "It's just a concern that I have if we don't have a backup here," Stone said Friday. Kicklighter added that based on a text message he received from Pooler City Manager Robbie Byrd on Friday morning, the county should consider negotiating with the city of Pooler for the sale of the Hunter's Ridge system. In that way, he argued, the county could ensure that customers of that system never pay more for service than their fellow Pooler residents. Citing a desire to hold off on the purchase agreement to meet with Pooler, Kicklighter was the sole vote against the contract Friday. Other board members charged that Pooler had an opportunity to express an interest in the system's purchase when a request for proposals was issued earlier this year.

Water Utility Management President Mark Smith said he's optimistic of reaching an agreement with the city of Savannah to provide backup water in the event of a failure. He said he's also optimistic his firm will work out an agreement with Savannah for the future acceptance of wastewater from his company. Commissioners also voted to sell the Little Neck portion of the water system to Savannah-based Consolidated Utilities for \$63,000. County Attorney Jon Hart on Friday estimated he could bring an agreement for the future operations of the Modena Island well to the commission by its next meeting on Dec. 18. The county has been in negotiations with property owners on Modena for the future of that system.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
September 29, 2015

FOLLOW-UP AUDIT SHOWS IMPROVEMENTS IN BUILDING SAFETY DEPT.

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

A follow-up review of the Chatham County department that oversees building inspections and issues occupational tax certificates reveals that staffers have corrected some of a number of cash-handling problems identified last year by internal auditors. The Building Safety and Regulatory Services Department also is responsible for code enforcement and the tags for animal vaccinations.

According to the document produced by internal county auditors in May, five of nine internal control deficiencies in the department had been addressed since the first report, including problems with the security of the department's finances and the lack of daily deposits. Four issues remained, however, including a concern that the department's operations coordinator had too much oversight of the department's finances. This finding had not been corrected in the eight months since the first audit was completed, despite the department head's written response that he intended to "implement all the recommendations identified in the report."

The follow-up audit is dated May 15 - the same day the Savannah Morning News put in a request for any and all internal audits completed since the start of the year. The follow-up audit wasn't produced, however, until another request for internal audits was made Sept. 14.

WHAT IMPROVED

Last September, internal auditors with Chatham County sent a memo to the county manager that reported a slew of problems at the department. Among the concerns were missing receipt books, unsecured registers, an unlocked safe, cash deposit shortages and late deposits. In the response letter included with the audit, director Gregori Anderson promised to improve those operations. County Manager **Lee Smith** said in an interview in March that administrators would be monitoring the department to ensure improvements.

Although one follow up has been completed, Assistant County Manager Michael Kaigler said Friday administrators will continue to require additional follow-up audits at building safety. "One of the thing we saw is a disconnect. We didn't have departments doing continuous communication," **Smith** said Friday. "(Kaigler) is doing regular meetings with all these department managers, decision makers. ... That's really helping because those disconnects mean mistakes. We're able to avoid those situations because we're all talking now."

According to the most recent audit of the department's operations, building safety staffers have completed a required annual risk assessment - the first in at least two years. In addition, the department began maintaining animal registration records as the county's records retention policy required. Locks were installed on the cashier's drawer and bank deposit slips are now stored in the department's safe. The department also reconciles and deposits money collected daily. Unlike

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

the original audit, the follow-up makes no mention of cash shortages or missing funds, late deposits or poorly secured funds. "We actually met with the Homebuilders Association, and although I can't speak for them, they were very complimentary, saying we were acting in a timely manner ... that things were going well," **Smith** said. "We do know we're going to take a look at moving animal control ... (and then we) won't be collecting the animal control fee out there. We'll consolidate up front and be a bit user friendly."

WHAT DIDN'T IMPROVE

A recurring finding in audits of building safety has been the lack of segregation of duties. Last year, auditors reported no change in this condition since the previous report, and a similar note was made in the follow up - despite assurances from the director that closing the department's Chatham County annex location "eliminated the segregation of duties issue." This time around, the concern was that the department's operations coordinator continued to be involved in every level of handling and depositing cash, a practice that had led to cash shortages in the past. The operations coordinator had also continued to process and record payments from a personal office - despite previous audit recommendations and instructions to conduct all processing at the cashier's booth - "up to and including ... the day before auditors reported to Building Safety."

"An effective system of internal control over cash receipts requires that the reporting and depositing functions be separated; this decreases the likelihood of errors (or) misappropriation," auditors wrote. "Conversely, the likelihood of errors and possible misappropriation increases when employees responsible for handling these cash receipts also maintain the records used to document such receipts."

Assistant County Manager Linda Cramer said this concern could be explained by a staff shortage at the time of the internal auditor's visit. The department was without a cashier during that period, she said. "There is a cashier up there now, and I think she's working out really well," Cramer said Friday. Meanwhile, auditors found that in some cases, receipts had been erased from the system without explanation and without management's knowledge. In some cases, daily reconciliation reports were inaccurate, missing or incomplete. The auditor also pointed out that the department had ordered another receipt printer, even though an assistant county manager had instructed them not to last August.

The report suggested more in-depth reviews of businesses to which occupational tax division issues permits and an update to the department's cash-handling policy. The county commission voted in January to require all departments that handle cash to develop written financial policies and ensure these policies are followed. In an email last week, Chatham County Finance Director Amy Davis reported that most departments had followed through. Some, she said, are still working on their policies with the help of a consultant because of changes to their software or recommendations in their audits. The internal audit department is reviewing the policies one-by-one, Davis wrote.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

A final concern in the follow-up audit about an "outdated" computer software used by the department wasn't thoroughly reviewed, auditors wrote, because the county was in the process of replacing it. Cramer said she wasn't sure this aspect of the audit report will ever be fully resolved. All totaled, of the 16 recommendations made by auditors last September, the department by May had implemented nine of them, the follow up says.

NEW ISSUES

The follow-up identified two additional areas of concern. In two separate cases, customers of the building safety department were subjected to charges that violated county policy. The occupation tax department had implemented a \$5 fee for businesses seeking copies of their occupational tax certificate, despite a county ordinance that sets the cost at 25 cents per page.

Customers paying by credit or debit card at the office, meanwhile, were being charged convenience fees, despite a recent change to county policy that waived these fees for walk-in customers. Cramer said these charges have since been rectified. In addition, she said, outside auditors are in the process of reviewing the operations at Building Safety and Regulatory Services as part of their annual audit of Chatham County. "They've been out there for a couple of days," Cramer said. "I'm interested to see what they're going to say. They're the ones that caught on to this in the first place."

Smith said county managers in the meantime are continuing to hold regular discussions with various departments and are planning regular visits to those departments. "We need to be more visible as a management team," he said. "I think that helps with morale. It's tough when you're in a department and you're seen as having problems. People have pride in what they do and they want it done well."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: To view this Lawsuit in its entirety, please follow the link below.]

<https://casetext.com/case/santifort-v-sue-guy-in-her-pers-capacity>
September 8, 2015

Santifort v. Guy

Civil Action No. 4:14-CV-225-F
09-08-2015

DONNA R. SANTIFORT, Plaintiff, v. SUE GUY in her personal capacity, **LEE SMITH**, in his personal capacity, JOE GURLEY, in his personal capacity, STEVE KEEN, in his personal capacity, and COUNTY OF WAYNE, NORTH CAROLINA, Defendants.

James C. Fox Senior United States District Judge

ORDER

Plaintiff Donna Santifort ("Santifort") sues Defendants Sue Guy, **Lee Smith**, Joe Gurley, Steve Keen and County of Wayne for damages arising from her termination of employment. The defendants have filed three motions to dismiss, all of which have been fully briefed. For the reasons more fully stated below, the motions to dismiss are DENIED.

I. FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

Santifort initiated this action by filing a complaint in this court on December 5, 2014 [DE-1]. She filed an Amended Complaint [DE-4] later that same day. In the Amended Complaint, Santifort alleges she was terminated in violation of her First Amendment rights and wrongfully discharged in violation of public policy.

II. STANDARD OF REVIEW

III. DISCUSSION

All of the Defendants have filed motions to dismiss, which have overlapping arguments. All Defendants contend that Santifort has not stated a First Amendment retaliation claim. Specifically, Defendants argue that Santifort's speech and petitions were not protected by the First Amendment because they were not made in her capacity as a citizen and did not involve a matter of public concern. Defendants Guy and **Smith** also argue the claims must be dismissed because Santifort has not adequately alleged causation, and because they are entitled to qualified immunity.

As to **Smith**, the court notes that as a matter of state law, he had the authority to terminate Santifort's employment. See N.C. Gen. Stat. § 153A-82(1); see also 6A N.C. Index 4th § 35 ("In counties that have a county manager, the county manager is responsible for suspending or removing county officers, employees, and agents and is required to do so in accordance with any general personnel rules, regulations, policies, or ordinances that the board has adopted."). This, combined with the allegation that Santifort was terminated in **Smith's** office at a meeting he

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

convened gives rise to the plausible inference that **Smith** terminated her employment. **Smith** makes much of the fact that Santifort has alleged that he signed a letter thanking her for her comments, and that she alleges that his ouster was the goal of the scheme by fellow Defendants Guy, Gurley and Keen. The fact that **Smith** thanked Santifort for her comments in September does not foreclose the idea that he may have preferred her not to speak; moreover, although the different Defendants may have had differing reasons for their desire to silence Santifort, it does not preclude the inference that Smith terminated Santifort in retaliation for her critical remarks at the County Commissioner meetings. Santifort will, of course, have to gather evidence to support these inference and contentions, but at this juncture her allegations are sufficient.

Guy similarly contends there are no factual allegations showing that she was involved in Santifort's termination, and accordingly the claims against her in her personal capacity must be dismissed. Under § 1983, "it must be affirmatively shown that the official charged acted personally in the deprivation of the plaintiff's rights." *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841, 850 (4th Cir. 1985) (internal quotation and citation omitted). It is true that unlike Smith, there is no indication that Guy had the statutory authority to terminate Santifort's employment, nor are there allegations that she was present for Santifort's termination. Nevertheless, Santifort alleges that Guy, along with other defendants, used her as a pawn in a scheme to ultimately oust Smith as manager, and that once that scheme on its way to being accomplished, they had no further need of her. Santifort also alleges that two days after her outburst at Guy, she was terminated without giving a statement.

In this case, Guy and **Smith** argue only that Santifort has not met her burden in alleging facts that make out a violation of a constitutional right. For the reasons the court already has discussed, the court disagrees, and finds that the record precludes a ruling on qualified immunity at this time. Moreover, neither Guy nor **Smith** proffer any argument as to why they have met their burden in showing that the right was not clearly established at the time of the incidents giving rise to this action. Accordingly, the motions to dismiss are denied on this basis. B. Wrongful Discharge Claim

IV. CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the Motions to Dismiss [DE-17, 26] are DENIED. The Motion to Dismiss [DE-12] filed by Defendants County of Wayne, Joe Gurley, and Steve Keen is DENIED as to the § 1983 claims and ALLOWED as to wrongful discharge claim. The Clerk of Court is DIRECTED to continue the management of this case. SO ORDERED. This the 8th day of September, 2015.

/s/ _____

James C. Fox

Senior United States District Judge

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
September 2, 2015

'WHISTLE-BLOWER' CHALLENGES FIRING

Author/Byline: Jan Skutch

An attorney for a fired Chatham County employee is challenging the termination, arguing she was a "whistle-blower" who was fired for calling attention to "serious financial deficiencies" in the county office.

Shaundra D. Smith-McKeithen, 45, was terminated by the county's Building Safety and Regulatory Services Department on Aug. 27, 2014, after an internal audit revealed multiple problems - going back for years - in management of funds and permits. Those problems were never corrected.

Attorney Bobby Phillips, in an ante litem notice of claim last week, said the termination was wrongful. "The basis of this claim is my client's contention that she was fired because she was a 'whistle-blower,'" Phillips said. "I understand Ms. Smith-McKeithen was in a probation status as a new employee; however, it is my contention that the Whistleblower Act trumps any spurious attempt by the county to avail itself of a defense on that basis."

An ante litem letter is required for a person who plans to sue a governmental unit. Phillips said he was notifying the county to give them time to investigate the claim and avoid litigation. Smith-McKeithen has announced she will run for the Savannah city council in the 5th District, opposing incumbent Estella Shabazz.

According to Phillips, his client notified County Manager **Lee Smith** to "serious financial deficiencies" in the department and her complaints were validated by an audit performed Sept. 24, 2014. "Apparently the deficiencies had existed as far back as 2012 when there was a similar audit," Phillips said. "Those deficiencies were never corrected."

The Sept. 24 audit report found concerns regarding the handling of payments similar to issues discovered in 2012 but never corrected. **Smith** attributed the department's problems to a lack of proper training and policies, as well as inadequate staffing.

Smith-McKeithen, who supervised the issuance of business licenses in the occupational tax office, was given her termination notice on Aug. 27, 2014, after being hired in mid-March. She said at the time she was being fired after she tried to fix a culture that fostered problems within the department.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
June 27, 2015

CHATHAM BUDGET TO HELP USHER IN PROJECTS\ - PUBLIC WORKS, MORE STAFF, COMPENSATION PART OF TAX INCREASE

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

The Chatham County Commission on Friday adopted a combined \$463 million budget and maintained its millage rates, a move that will increase taxes but also kick off long-awaited projects. For the maintenance and operations property tax - the property tax paid countywide - commissioners set the millage rate at 11.543 mills, the same rate paid by Chatham County property owners in 2014. Because the county opted not to roll back the millage rate this year, growth in property values will reflect a 4.37 percent increase. Last year, the county commission reduced the M&O millage to its current level by distributing \$4 million in excess special purpose local option sales tax funds. That SPLOST rebate has since been depleted, but County Manager **Lee Smith** said Friday increasing the millage won't be necessary to get additional initiatives started.

During the upcoming budget year, which begins July 1, the county will be hiring staff and buying equipment for the public works and building safety departments, **Smith** said. The result will be more building inspectors for areas that have been under-served, he said, more right-of-way maintenance and better upkeep of local parks - all while keeping the millage rate flat. These property taxes will feed some other changes in the \$170 million general fund, including higher compensation for county jurors and grand jurors, an increase to workers' salaries and some new positions, according to the county's 2016 budget proposal.

In addition, the commission maintained the millage rate for the special service district - the amount paid only by property owners in the unincorporated area - at 4.13. Growth in property values will increase the amount paid by property owners in the unincorporated county by 1.37 percent. This millage rate helps to balance the \$30 million special service district fund. The SSD budget includes \$14 million for Chatham County's share to operate the Savannah-Chatham police department plus another \$250,000 for the county to hire a consultant to review the police department's operations and determine the county's true share of costs and ownership. Despite these costs, the county manager reported that Chatham County will pay about \$2 million less for police service in the upcoming budget year than it did in the current fiscal year. The commission also maintained 1 mill for the Chatham Area Transit service district, which, after accounting for value growth, is a 4.71 percent increase over the amount paid in 2014.

Commissioner Helen Stone, a member of the CAT board of directors, reported Friday that for the first time in many years, CAT has not ended the year with a deficit. "This is one of the first times they have had a budget operating in the black, and they're paying down their line of credit," Stone said. "I think the staff at Chatham Area Transit needs to be commended for that."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
May 24, 2015

TOP BOSS: A YEAR IN THE LIFE\ - COUNTY MANAGER HAS TACKLED CHANGE, PROMISES MORE STILL TO COME

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

Sitting in his office at the old county courthouse on Bull Street on the day of his first anniversary, May 12, Chatham County Manager **Lee Smith** says it's hard to believe a year has gone by already. Much of his time as the county's chief appointed official has been spent responding to questions and comments from the public or meeting with his counterparts in the county's various municipalities. He also meets regularly with his executive team of department heads and Chatham Commission Chairman Al Scott. On many of his days outside the office, he says he found himself driving around, getting acquainted with his new community and the places that came up in discussions with county commissioners or team members. He acknowledges that a lot has changed since he took up his post, and, he says, more change can be expected in the year to come.

THE POLICE MERGER AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH SAVANNAH

On May 13, just a day after **Smith** sat down to discuss his first year as county manager, he joined with Savannah City Manager Stephanie Cutter to announce a new proposal to fund and operate the Savannah-Chatham police department. It was a step forward, he told those gathered at the press conference, not only because it showed how far negotiations over the police department had come, but also because it showed how cooperative the two governments had become. It was a far cry from the comments he was making at commission meetings late last year when he bemoaned the city's lack of responsiveness. "When you've got a relationship between individuals or corporations or governments, you've got to build loyalty and trust," **Smith** says. "It doesn't just happen. Stephanie and I have had multiple meetings ... Now we have a relationship where we can trust each other. It's the same thing with the other managers. We now meet quarterly with all the city managers. We all get together and discuss items, and I think that's key. It's just the communication."

Chairman Scott says his goal to improve these relationships and it seems to be working. "He's been holding meetings with the managers of all the townships and the manager at the Landings. She represents a community of roughly 10,000 people," Scott says. "We're just quietly trying to improve our working relationship with all the cities. (**Smith**) buys into that, so his agenda is my agenda, and my agenda is his agenda. He's not out freelancing. That's what I like about him. He spends a lot of time reaching out." Of course, not every meeting with the local city managers is going to be devoid of conflict. Each of these managers answer to a collection of elected representatives, all of whom have their own priorities and agendas. But the conflict, **Smith** says, isn't always a bad thing. When push comes to shove, community leaders in Chatham and the surrounding counties have shown they can band together. Look, for instance, at the joint development authority created in what was ultimately an unsuccessful bid to woo the Swedish auto manufacturer Volvo. "With Volvo we were disappointed, but it proved one thing. We were

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

able to put a joint development authority together ... in less than 60 days. That's amazing," he says. "We're all disappointed about Volvo, but that's case in point, we were all prepared. Bring on the next project."

FINDING AND SOLVING PROBLEMS

Only a few months after settling into his new role with Chatham County, the new manager found himself facing audits and lawsuits that showed systemic problems in some county departments. Internal and external audits revealed that the Building Safety & Regulatory Services department was missing money, slow to cash checks and not operating as auditors had recommended. Not long after, an attorney for the families of workers killed in the 2008 explosion at the Imperial Sugar Refinery filed suit against the county, alleging that a former probate court clerk had stolen thousands of dollars set aside for the children of the deceased. Most recently, Sheriff Al St Lawrence announced the firing of nine deputies, some of whom, he said, contributed to the death of an inmate on New Year's Day.

These are problems, **Smith** says, but they're also opportunities for improvement. The county manager says many of the issues he's found in different departments can be traced back to inconsistencies in oversight and not following policies. In the case of the courts, **Smith** says, the county in the past had been involved only as far as paying for services. Despite contributing substantially to the operation of the local courts, Chatham officials haven't had much oversight. This, he says, needs to change. "Courts are not necessarily our area. However, we have responsibility," **Smith** says. "We pay money for some of those services, so we should have more oversight for the money we're spending. We have some great judges, but we have some flaws, and those are being dealt with by the right authorities." A new financial policy approved by the county commission in January should help county departments avoid future problems, he adds. Each department head was instructed to draft financial policies that included internal controls, and finance director Amy Davis has said they must be in place by the start of the next fiscal year.

Departments that handle cash will be under video surveillance, **Smith** says, for the safety of the county's customers and for its employees. "Everybody's heard me say, people respect what you inspect," he says. "I think (the problem) has been inconsistent policy and our inability to inspect the departments on a regular basis (but) now we're doing that. One of the things you're going to see this year is we're upping the security systems. I'm going to have a camera that (records) every transaction."

A NEW APPROACH TO BUDGETING

Much will be said about Chatham County's budget during the next few weeks, as the county commission prepares to adopt the spending plan for the next fiscal year. It's the second year the county has crafted a zero-based budget, a more thorough process that requires justification for every expense. Because he started with the county after much of the grunt work on the current budget was complete, this will be the first year **Smith** will be truly involved in planning for the county's fiscal year. Unlike this year, there will be no contingencies in the budget for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1. While the county previously provided for department heads to make emergency expenses without getting clearance from the county commission, Smith says

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the removal of contingencies will free up about \$700,000. "People are a little nervous about that, but it forces you to budget better," he says. "(A contingency) falsely inflates the budget. I think it needs to be a true budget." Along with the removal of nearly all the contingencies, **Smith** says, you'll see more focus on capital projects in the upcoming budget. "We definitely have to look at our capital policies," he says sternly. "We do not fund capital up front. We fund capital on the back end. We fund capital by, 'Let's see what's left over.'" The lack of planning for future capital purchases has left the county in the uncomfortable position of telling taxpayers they're going to have to wait for services. And developing a capital plan isn't going to be immediate. **Smith** says it will take at least five years to get a capital budget in good working order, and even then the county may have to look at borrowing money to get the projects going.

Also stay tuned for a greater reserve fund.

Smith says he's been given the directive by Chairman Scott to improve the county's bond rating. He says doing so will require enough reserves to fund the county for 90 days and a more fiscally conservative approach to running county government. "I wanted fiscal responsibility," Scott says. "That's an umbrella phrase, but I don't think we do a good job on planning capital projects or setting aside funds to meet those needs. We usually respond to stuff, rather than plan for it. "The county has a AA bond rating, I want to move it to AAA. You just can't get there overnight. ... Much of what the county manager is doing is heading us in the right direction. You can't accumulate anything short term. We're looking at it long range. I want to keep taxes low as possible, I want to eliminate duplication of services, I want to improve the county bond rating, and where we can, I want to support local business. (**Smith**) understands that."

CHISELING AWAY AT THE PROJECT LIST

Smith says he expects to get more county projects started in his second year. A major special purpose local option sales tax project, reconstruction of Memorial Stadium, will kick off in the next year. The county is still determining how it will proceed with the stadium. Should they build it elsewhere or reconstruct it? The county this year also anticipates kick-starting renovations at the J. Tom Coleman Courthouse with SPLOST funds, part of a larger, three-phase project that will result in a new court complex on Montgomery Street. Chatham officials are weighing funding the project through a public-private partnership, and a review of the bids for such a partnership is under way. "You're going to see a lot of SPLOST projects starting," **Smith** says. "I definitely think you're going to see some capital that will impact the general public. My board made it clear to me that when this last SPLOST was adopted there was still SPLOST money on the table that we haven't spent, and we should have. We're putting bids out, and we're going to get these projects started. "People voted on some projects years ago and have not seen anything happen. Why? If there's a reason, tell folks. But let's not sit on things. Let's get it done. I'm excited about getting some of these things to happen." Another major upcoming project will be the sale of the county's water/sewer program, he adds. The enterprise has lost funds for years, **Smith** says, and creates a disparity between unincorporated neighborhoods that have the service and those that do not.

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INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PUBLIC

Smith says a surprising facet of his job is the amount of time he spends dealing with the day-to-day problems of Chatham County homeowners. He is faced with these challenges more now than in any other government position he's held. He recalls a time recently when the county was contacted by a local property owner who had dealt with flooding in her backyard for years. "She felt like nobody was responding to her - the city, the county," he says. "I took out like 10 people from different agencies. We went out and looked because we owed her an explanation for what was going on." Not only did it benefit the property owner in question, **Smith** says, but it gave him an opportunity to see how county employees are interacting with the public they serve. He says he stresses to his employees that the public deserves to be respected, to be heard when they have a problem. "Genuinely listening to them, caring about what's going on with them, is important. I hear too much about government for the sake of government, and none of us are entitled to these jobs. We're here to work for 200,000 and some people," he says. Chatham County Commission Chairman Al Scott's opinion of the county manager's work during the first year: "I'm very happy with his performance over the last 12 months, and I think it's the beginning of hopefully a long-lasting relationship with the county. I think he's energetic, he's proactive. I think he's going to move the county in the area of increased technology. "He has a number of things on his plate, and he brought with him when he came here things he was doing at smaller counties that he's going to implement."

Three months after County Manager **Lee Smith** took up his post with the county, he listed these priorities. Here's how he's done so far:

* Development of a long-term strategic plan: The county commission in November approved a contract with the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition to gather data and develop a strategic plan for the community. The plan, which will be known as Chatham Community Blueprint 2035, will span 20 years. It is expected to be complete by this December.

* Reorganization of Animal Control: Included in the framework for a new agreement to operate the Savannah-Chatham police department is a provision that places the animal control division under the county manager's oversight by July 1, 2016. **Smith** has said the department at that time will be civilian operated and will likely rely on partnerships with organizations like the Humane Society for Greater Savannah.

* Service request system: The county manager has eyed the city of Savannah's 311 system as a model for a similar program in Chatham County. He said he envisions a mobile application that would allow the county to track the source of its requests for service and provide for photos and other data. This has not yet been developed.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
May 1, 2015

**EMERGENCY EXPENSES AT HEART OF BUDGET\ - COUNTY'S \$200M PLAN
INCREASES TRANSPARENCY**

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

Chatham commissioners on Thursday got their first look at a \$200 million budget proposed to operate the county for the upcoming fiscal year. The spending plan presented by finance director Amy Davis includes nearly \$170 million in the general fund and \$30 million in the county's special service district. It anticipates a 1 percent increase in the county tax digest. Though the county is continuing the thorough, zero-based budgeting process that began with this year's budget, the upcoming budget marks a shift in the county's spending philosophy. Previously, the county had built in contingencies to provide department heads with flexibility to make emergency expenses, but the proposed budget for the upcoming year has cut all the contingencies - about \$700,000 worth, Davis said.

County Manager **Lee Smith** said this was an intentional change to increase transparency in budgeting process. "It was one of my policies to eliminate contingencies," **Smith** told the board during its non-voting workshop. "If I need to make a change in the budget, I need to come to you."

The change will require more than just the county manager to present his need to the board, commission Chairman Al Scott said. All of the county's constitutional officers such as the sheriff and district attorney will be required to justify their emergency expenses before they're allowed to make them.

Another first is the development of a capital improvement plan, which the county manager expects will track capital expenses and keep them in line with the commission's forthcoming strategic plan. Currently, **Smith** said, the county isn't funding capital projects on a regular basis and the result is a backlog of needs that have not been addressed. "Capital assessment management is something our team has talked about a lot," **Smith** said. "There are hundreds of millions of dollars of capital needs that the county is saying we need that are not funded. ... That's not how you fund capital. You incorporate that in a long-term capital reserve and you begin to put money away to pay for that."

Other expenses expected during the next fiscal year, which runs from July 1 to June 30, 2016:

* The budget includes a pay increase for jurors and grand jurors. In February, the county signed off on a request from Superior Court Administrator Crystal Cooper to grow the allowance for jurors from \$10 to \$15 for the first day of service and from \$20 to \$30 for grand jurors and for jurors sworn in on a panel. This will be paid for out of the general fund.

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William Lee Smith
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* The general fund includes a 1.5 percent increase to the salary table and considers new positions, including a public communications officer and audio/video technician.

* The board is still weighing two options for the \$30 million budget for the special services district. One option includes a \$14 million contract with the city of Savannah to co-fund the Savannah-Chatham police department. The other provides for \$16 million to restart and operate a county police department. No agreement has been signed by either side to continue the joint department, and a scheduled presentation on a framework proposed for a new agreement did not take place Thursday.

Smith said he expects officials from both sides to release a joint statement related to a new merger agreement early next week. That will include a new division of costs for Chatham County Recorder's Court.

Scott said the county has incurred about \$2,000 in expenses to hire a search firm to find a county police chief in the event negotiations don't pan out. The expense for a county police department is expected to decrease after the initial startup costs. **Smith** said the commission will get a more thorough view of the budget document during its meeting Friday.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News
April 11, 2015

**COUNTY: MAYOR MISSES MARK \ DESPITE LETTER, OFFICIAL SAYS POLICE
MERGER STILL NEEDS WORK EVEN THOUGH SOME ISSUES RESOLVED**

Author/Byline: Kelly Quimby

As Chatham County administrators prepared to head back to the bargaining table with officials from the city of Savannah, county officials on Friday were making it clear that an agreement over the future of the Savannah-Chatham police department wasn't as close as city officials had made it seem.

In the latest chapter of the public back-and-forth between Savannah and Chatham County officials, county manager **Lee Smith** said the two governments have not agreed upon a framework for a new police merger agreement - despite claims to the contrary made by Savannah Mayor Edna Jackson in a letter delivered to Chatham Commission Chairman Al Scott earlier this week. There are still points to be worked out between staff members, **Smith** said during an impromptu discussion of the subject at the county commission's meeting Friday.

It's true that some issues have been resolved, Chairman Scott said. Scott said he discussed many of the items in Jackson's letter - including cost sharing for animal control, mosquito control and for property crimes investigations - with her during a regular lunch meeting earlier this month. But something was missing from her list, the chairman said. "One of the things we discussed at lunch that's not in her letter is that after two years, we would move to an evidenced-based funding formula - no ifs, no ands, no buts," Scott said. "That's not in the letter. Outside of that, those are points we discussed."

The county in recent months has proven unwilling to budge on this funding proposal. Arguments against it have been that it would prove too expensive for city residents. That, Scott said, is not the county's concern. "I want this to be as clear as a bell. The county's policing responsibility is to the unincorporated area of Chatham County," he said. "This isn't about crime-fighting in Savannah. We have no responsibility for it. Period. This must be emphasized. "I just wanted to make it clear ... I don't have any responsibility for policing anything in the city of Savannah."

Addressing pleas for third-party mediation that have come from officials in Savannah and the business community, **Smith** said the county has received few to no specifics about how a mediation would be conducted.

Chatham officials previously said an agreement with the city needed to be reached by the end of March, but **Smith** told Commissioner Dean Kicklighter on Friday the "drop dead date" for an agreement will have to be sometime this month. It has been nearly seven months since the county voted unanimously Sept. 26 to end the current merger agreement and set an 18-month deadline to reach a new one.

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Last month, the county voted to approve a contract with Baltimore-based Stanton Chase to search for a county police chief at a cost not to exceed \$65,000. Scott reported that while money hasn't yet been spent, work to develop a profile for the right candidate has begun. The search firm will be billing its work at an hourly rate.

Smith said a new chief could be in place as early as August or September, and the county could then move ahead with its plans to rebuild and operate a department at an annual cost that Smith said will be less than what the county is currently paying for police service under its agreement with Savannah.

Smith told a skeptical Commissioner Yusuf Shabazz he'd bet on his position with the county that the savings would come in by at least \$2 million a year. "We've looked at the model ... I think we will be well within \$2 million (in savings)," **Smith** said. "We've had our experts look at it. You will pay less than you're paying today. I will guarantee you, I will place my job on the line you will not (pay more)."

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Savannah Morning News (GA)
May 9, 2014

COUNTY'S NEW BOSS STARTS MONDAY

Author/Byline: Marcus E. Howard

Following retiring Chatham County Manager Russ Abolt's final county commission meeting today, his successor is set to begin work Monday - though a salary agreement has yet to be finalized.

Lee Smith has not signed and returned the county's one-page compensation offer, which was sent to him via FedEx along with paperwork and a copy of the county's employee manual. **Smith** has been dealing with a family illness in Durham, N.C., but is expected to travel this weekend to Savannah, said Al Scott, commission chairman.

As there is no agreement to consider, the commission will likely take up **Smith's** salary at the May 23 meeting, said Scott, who has been working with the county attorney to determine whether **Smith's** employment benefits are subject to commission approval. **Smith's** nomination as county manager was approved unanimously by the commission on April 11. The details of his compensation package have not been disclosed. However, he will be paid less than he made as county manager in Wayne County, N.C., Scott confirmed.

Considered among North Carolina's highest paid county managers, **Smith** received \$221,408 annually, plus a \$12,000 travel allowance, as part of a six-year contract that was terminated earlier this year when he and Wayne County reached a \$325,000 settlement over his severance package following his resignation.

According to Scott, the salary range for the Chatham County manager position was between \$175,000 and \$220,000. "I said to him that I wasn't willing to match his salary in North Carolina, at least not the first year, because based on performance you want to be able to reward somebody," said Scott. However, **Smith** has been offered an open-ended contract that could be renegotiated in July 2015. And should he be forced out of office this calendar year, under the terms of the contract **Smith** could be entitled to six-months of severance pay, said Scott.

In addition to a transportation allowance, **Smith** - who turns 50 this month - would be entitled to benefits under the county's defined benefit retirement program based on salary and years of service, self-insured health plan and life insurance coverage of one times his salary.

Meanwhile, Abolt, who has been cleaning out his corner office of 26 years this week, will work for the county as a paid consultant over the next few weeks, not to exceed 90 days. He will, according to Scott, be compensated based on his nearly \$190,000 annual salary, which could amount to a little more than \$700 a day. In 2012, commissioners granted Abolt a retirement package that included \$30,000 a year for six years after his retirement, plus coverage of his and his wife's health, dental and life insurance premiums, as well as a \$200,000 non-term life

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

insurance policy. Abolt also elected to continue participation in an independent defined contribution plan.

As county manager, **Smith** will oversee about 1,544 county employees and a half-billion-dollar county budget. Approximately 98 percent of the fiscal year 2015 budget will have been completed by staff by the time **Smith** sits down next week at his new desk in the Old Courthouse on Bull Street. A budget workshop with county officials has tentatively been scheduled for June 3.

One of **Smith's** first tasks will be to meet with county employees in various departments and later with Scott and the two assistant county managers to discuss what it will take to successfully work together. Scott and Abolt were scheduled to meet Thursday to talk about his consultation. "That's why Russ is so invaluable so that he can sit down with him and just go over all that," said Scott.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
February 13, 2014

Smith steps down as Wayne Co. manager

Author/Byline: Barry Merrill

The dance that began six weeks ago that would lead to **Lee Smith** leaving his post as Wayne County Manager ended suddenly Monday afternoon. County Commissioners adjourned from a session to discuss school funding to an executive session to discuss with their attorney an offer to resign from Mr. **Smith**. When they reconvened in open session, a unanimous vote approved paying Mr. **Smith** \$325, 000 in settlement of his employment contract and agreement to leave the office. The agreement which was made part of the public record and released to the public states all parties agree not to make written or verbal statements that hurt the personal or professional reputation of those involved. All questions to the county on the matter are to be directed to County Attorney Borden Parker.

Mr. **Smith** had been the target of County Commissioner Joe Daugherty for many months, criticizing the costs of his contract which the former Democrat-controlled county board had approved. In October, Daugherty made a motion to fire Mr. **Smith**, but none of the other commissioners voted in favor of the motion.

In late December, the county granted an emergency leave of absence to the county manager, by some accounts reacting to stress from pressure from the board. In early January, his status changed to a paid leave of absence, with Commissioner John Bell, the lone Democratic holdover from the former board, voting against. Mr. Bell offered the motion Monday afternoon to accept the resignation agreement.

In January Mr. **Smith** retained an attorney to represent him in negotiations with the county, and his attorney publicly asserted if the county fired Mr. **Smith**, the county would owe Mr. **Smith** \$1.4 million under the terms of his employment contract.

A motion by Daugherty was not on the agenda for Monday's meeting, but a resolution had been anticipated. Chairman Wayne Aycock had appointed a working group to begin interviewing potential candidates to assume an interim manager position. They had begun interviews on Friday. Commissioners Ray Mayo, Bill Pate and Ed Cromartie are serving as that working group. They had a second interview on Tuesday. Commissioners are hopeful that an interim manager can be named by the end of February, as the county should be deep in the budgeting process at this point of the fiscal year. As there has been no deputy or assistant county manager on the staff, it is widely anticipated that the county will have to recruit someone from another county to take Mr. **Smith**'s place. The NC Association of County Commissioners has been contacted for help finding suitable candidates.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
January 9, 2014

Wayne Co. Manager is suspended

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

Wayne County Manager **Lee Smith** was suspended with pay last Friday during a special meeting of the Board of Commissioners. The board voted 6-1 with District 3 Commissioner John Bell casting the lone vote against the measure, which was decided after a 2½ hour closed session meeting.

No one on the board would say the reason for the suspension and when or if Smith would return to his post. Smith had been on a leave of absence since Dec. 17 when At-large Commissioner Wayne Aycock was named acting county manager. Smith was not at the most recent meeting, held in the Wayne County Administrative Building. County Attorney Borden Parker said the closed session meeting was necessary because it involved attorney-client privilege and the board would be considering "the performance and fitness of county employees."

Smith had seemingly no problems during his first decade plus time in the manager's box. But that changed when the board switched from a Democratic to Republican majority a year ago. Six months later, the board voted on whether to keep **Smith** or remove him.

Upset about a payroll issue, District 6 Commissioner Joe Daughtry made the motion to void the contract with **Smith** at the board's July 16 public meeting. Daughtry cast the lone vote against **Smith**. And since the board refuses to give specifics to the public, rumors, guessing and misinformation abound. What is known is that **Smith** makes more than \$200, 000 annually and may not return based on his life situation and/or the board's decision.

When Aycock took over, he said **Smith's** leave of absence was temporary. "Lee has asked for some time off and I think it's well deserved," Aycock said. "It's only going to be a couple of weeks."

Wayne County does not have an assistant county manager or for that matter anyone with a track record of being responsible for nearly every aspect of county business, including financial matters. The Democratic board gave **Smith** a six-year contract on Jan. 1, 2012.

The county can terminate the contract by giving **Smith** a 30-day notice, but would have to pay his salary and provide benefits, even if **Smith** were suspended from his duties. The county would then have to pay **Smith** a one-time payment to cover any accrued vacation and personal time and also pay his salary and benefits for 12 months. The board set no timetable for **Smith's** return, nor did it say he would return.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Mount Olive Tribune (NC)
November 27, 2013

Commissioners get \$1.87 million shopping spree

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

The demise of the North Carolina Eastern Region group has turned into an economic development tool for Wayne County. On Tuesday, Nov. 19, the Wayne County Board of Commissioners decided to take advantage of money it gave to the organization to fund four projects for a cost of approximately \$1.87 million.

County Manager **Lee Smith** and District 3 Commissioner John Bell, a member of the Eastern Region board, put a quick plan of action together that includes the purchase of a 45-acre site in the Mount Olive Industrial Park, 50 acres for a veteran's cemetery, equipment for Wayne Community College and renovations at the Wayne Executive Jetport. The four projects will be funded fully and Wayne County can also borrow up to \$576, 000 with the one thirteenth-allocation portion from the 13 counties in the Eastern Region. The five-year loan has a 1 percent interest rate.

"These are long term investments that will do good for the county and citizens in different ways," **Smith** said. "This money is an investment in our future. We tried to target how we use the money, so that it would have an impact for 20 to 30 years."

Bell was instrumental in making sure the county would get its share, an amount that was collected from license plate sales since 1998.

Smith drew up the action plan, which he said couldn't tackle an extremely costly project, such as infrastructure concerns, but one that would help several places in the county.

Bell said the Eastern Region group is closing in June 2014 "Let's make this clear, this is \$1.8 million that already belongs to Wayne County, but indeed, Mr. Bell is getting his wish," District 1 Commissioner Ray Mayo said. "This could set us on a pace for economic development and our No. 1 concern, creating jobs. But at the same time it will increase the quality of life for all of Wayne County. It also helps Seymour Johnson (Air Force Base) with flight encroachment."

Smith has worked out a deal to purchase the property in the Mount Olive Industrial Park for \$420, 000. The county already owns two plots of land next to it, which are 47 and 24 acres. All three plots are located behind Hwy 55's headquarters (formerly known as Andy's) and between Old Mount Olive Highway (SR 1938) and U.S. 117. Mt. Olive Pickle Company owns the property on the backside of the county's land. Fifty-plus acres for the cemetery, located along Long's Plant Farm Road, would cost \$462, 600.

Welding equipment that will be stored and used at Wayne Community College was a part of the Wayne Economic Development Alliance's proposed Manufacturing Center of Excellence. The

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William Lee Smith
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county will spend nearly \$300, 000 on welders, \$130, 000 on simulated welding Smith training equipment, and \$275, 000 on a waterjet machining center and \$69, 500 on a CNC mill that works in conjunction with WCC's engineering lab. Workers and students will then be able to use computer-aided manufacturing, or CAD, with computer-aided manufacturing (CAM). The hands on CAD-CAM will allow students to learn about the realities of modern industry. "These are the jobs that are in manufacturing today," said District 5 Commissioner Bill Pate. "And they're good paying jobs. I'm hoping some day we find a bigger facility to put this in."

Smith said discussions on that matter are already on the table. He also said the money from the Eastern Region has to be used quickly. "I had been advised to draw it down as quickly as possible," **Smith** said. "So we're looking to having it done by spring to June."

At-Large Commissioner Wayne Aycock said the plan for spending the money was well devised. "All four projects are worthy, and I'm most excited about the WCC because it has educational opportunities and all that equipment," he said.

While **Smith's** spending plan passed unanimously, not everyone was happy it took flight so quickly. District 6 Commissioner Joe Daugherty expressed his dismay in not being in the loop as the plan took flight. "My concern is there wasn't any discussion on this and I wish I were at least asked for my input on how the funds would be used," he said. "This is the first time I'm hearing about this. It seems to me everyone on the board should be

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
February 21, 2013

Audit report praises state of Wayne County's finances

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

The recently elected Wayne County Board of Commissioners received an audit report Tuesday morning for the fiscal year that ended in June 2012. The report came from Paul Nunn and Danna Layne, accountants from Nunn, Brashear and Company. The twosome delivered good news on how the previous leadership had built up the county's reserve funds and that its credit rating had skyrocketed in recent years. Nunn said the county's finance department was awarded a certificate of achievement for excellence in financial report. "It's probably the 16th year in a row you've received this award," he said. "Your finance department has done a very good job."

The unqualified opinion from the accounting firm, the highest ranking given during an audit, showed many positives for the county. "Our debt ratio is very, very low compared to other counties," said County Manager **Lee Smith**. "This has helped us get a high rating and enables us to get loans and helps out in obtaining grants and money."

The county's reserve and general funds are extremely healthy. Nunn said the county does not have much in terms of outstanding capital loans, with the exception of those that funded new buildings at Norwayne and Eastern Wayne middle schools, which came via Qualified Construction School Bonds. It increased the county's long-term debt to \$13.77 million.

The county's net assets increased by \$1, 918, 372, mainly because of governmental activities. The unassigned funds in the general fund checked in at \$28.1 million, or 34 percent of total general fund expenditures. The state mandates that eight percent of the general budget be set aside as unassigned. Two Republicans questioned why the unassigned fund was such a high percentage. "Your officials in the past wanted an additional 14 percent, which is not that uncommon," Nunn said.

Final budgeted revenues for the general fund were \$97.9 million, while actual expenditures were \$83.8 million. Wayne County gets 55 percent of its governmental revenues via property taxes, nearly 21 percent from human services and 17.6 percent from sales tax. The county spends 32 percent of its governmental money on human services, 31.7 percent on education and almost 20 percent on public safety.

In the coming weeks, five Republicans will get a bigger input on the budget as **Smith** and his staff prepare the 2013-14 fiscal year. The commissioners will meet with every department head in the county on March 11-12. **Smith** said each department would be given about 15 minutes to talk with the board. The board has also scheduled a meeting with the Wayne County Public School board and high-ranking officials on March 15. These discussions will likely center around the school system's capital improvement projects, specifically buildings. Other topics at the meeting included: - The board talking with County Planning Manager Connie Price about

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

having his department approved small subdivisions, rather than bring them to the full board. Price said this would not include subdivisions or plans that affect the schools, fire departments or sheriff's office. They will revisit the topic at a later date.

Commissioners questioned a \$200, 000 budget amendment for the detention center. **Smith** said the money would hold the county over through the year in terms of paying to have prisoners outsourced to other facilities. He said the jail is always over its capacity of 200, usually by at least 40 inmates. He said that figure has spiked in the past six months and could rise even higher. "If it got as high as 60 it will take more," **Smith** said. "When you hit the 240 mark, the jail inspector starts writing you up."

The board also balked at forgiving \$26,000 that is owed to the county by Wayne Opportunity. The nonprofit handles the county's recycling and uses residents as workers. CEO John Chance said the company has laid off 18 staff workers, but still has 55 employees and 96 clients. Chance said one program has been eliminated and that the company owes \$27, 000 in back taxes. **Smith** said the county has an interest in keeping a relationship with Wayne Opportunities, mainly because it saves the county money.

Chance said the current price of \$54 a ton it receives for recycling materials is too low. "We're losing money until it goes over \$60 a ton," he said. "We've stopped our contributions to employees' 401K programs and are making every effort to stay in business." **Smith** said the county used to subsidize Wayne Opportunity but saves \$75, 000 to \$100, 000 annually from its agreement with the nonprofit. - Commissioner Joe Daughtery suggested the county look into options on residents who file late for present value use of land. The board has granted every late application in the past four months, and has to deal with the concern nearly every time it meets. The board approved a final resolution authorizing a grant programs for ACX Pacific Northwest, Inc.

In another matter that required more discussion, the board talked about whether it would sign off on a grant that would create a walking trail from Wayne Memorial Hospital to Wayne Community College through a medical park and residential district in Goldsboro. The county owns the land and would use it as part of the 25 percent match (\$200, 000). But the deal is contingent upon the city of Goldsboro taking responsibility for liability concerns of the trail. County Attorney Borden Parker said the county could get off the hook, but since it owns the land, it could be subject to responsibility in court, even after signing off to Goldsboro.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Princeton News-Leader (NC)
October 18, 2012

Wayne agrees to pay EMS workers time and a half for overtime hours

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

The Wayne County Commissioners approved a measure on Tuesday that pays emergency workers time and a half for overtime. The move was made months after numerous problems were found in the new payroll system used to tabulate paychecks for about 60 emergency workers. In the new system, adopted in July, many workers were both overpaid and underpaid. Bob Jackson, chairman of the Wayne County Republican Party, instigated the topic during the public comment portion of the meeting. "We continue to hear about problems and they have not been solved," he said. "Now I'm hearing some employees have obtained the services of an attorney. We're led to believe other departments have problems as well. And a \$200 gift of forgiveness for overpaid, why don't we give that to the underpaid?" Emergency worker Rich Swinson III, who lives in Princeton, said all employees have heard are promises that are not kept.

"Today, it was proposed by email by Mr. **Smith** (County Manager **Lee Smith**) we will get straight pay for up to 40 hours and all the hours over (are) time and a half," he said. "We welcome that as long as the hourly rates don't change. We would also like to pay back money in equal increments over the course of the coming year."

District 1 Commissioner Ray Mayo jumped on the topic as the first speaker during a time when commissioners can comment openly on any matter. "We need to approve time and a half today," he said. "I'm told Mr. **Smith** has already done that, so I ask the county attorney if this isn't something this board should have done? I'm not against what is being done, but the protocol. The commissioners should have been involved." Borden Parker, Wayne County Attorney, responded. "In my opinion, the board would need to approve it, and if it costs more, a budget amendment would have to be made," he said.

Smith said he felt the board was behind the move. "My understanding was in concept you accepted it," he said. Determining overtime has been the biggest concern, according to **Smith**. "It's only for EMS workers that we used Chinese, or fluctuating overtime came into play," he said. "I've never been able to figure it out. There's no incentive to work more and get paid less (per hour)." **Smith** said the problems would cost the county money. "Probably at least another \$200, 000 through this year," he said. "But we can afford to do this, and we owe these employees. We have the money, and I will bring an amendment to you in January."

"Somewhere down the line, that guessing about overtime has to stop," Commissioner Jack Best said. **Smith** agreed, but added there are unknown variables. "We have to have a cushion, such as in the case when there's a hurricane or disaster," he said. "We're not going back to the old system, we'll just inputting the data differently. We will be stronger after we come out of this." Emergency workers filled the seats at the previous two meetings. On Tuesday, about 10 showed up. They clapped when the proposal was approved.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
June 7, 2012

Smith presents budget proposal to Wayne County Commissioners

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

Wayne County Manager **Lee Smith** laid out his proposed 2012-13 budget Tuesday morning to commissioners. The board's initial reaction to the budget seemed to be positive, as everyone liked the proposal, trusted **Smith** to make the right decisions, or felt it was best to discuss any differences they had during the June 21 workshop. **Smith** said many big capital projects are being put into the budget, while others needed to be discussed. The budget must be in place by June 30. Among the wish list projects were:- Helping Wayne Community College with its power plant woes and possibly providing a new building.

- Helping the Division of Social Services - Helping the Agriculture Extension Center - Providing money for needed renovations at Wayne County Public Library's Goldsboro branch and the need for a hub library in the northern part of the county to match what is offered in Mount Olive and Goldsboro.

- Assisting in the master plan of the Wayne Executive Jetport.

"I'm asking the board to take a look at these, so we can choose our next step," **Smith** said. "We have to plan our future based on needs, mandates and money." The budget he has put together is chock full of projects that the county has already started, and a few that were once covered by the state or federal government, but are now in the hands of county officials. The \$159 million budget will not include a tax increase. The number of county employees has dropped from 927 in 2003 to 700, and **Smith** has asked all department heads to make 2.5 percent cuts. He also said there would be a job freeze on new employees. "I don't know if we can do that, but I'd like to try," he said. "These are painful and tough economic times. There's a limit to the freeze in that, for example, we have to replace someone like a DSS worker who has an unbelievable caseload. By law, we can't shift that to another employee." Big items included in the budget include: - Replacing about \$120, 000 lost from funding the Day Reporting Center, which **Smith** said saves the county about \$850, 000 annually.

Setting aside about \$1 million for renovations to the jail. Work started this week, but it will not include repairing the roof, which could cost another \$1 million. Spending about \$300, 000 to add quick response vehicles for the Emergency Services and additional help. The move is in lieu of adding another EMS station, and to keep the response time to about eight minutes. Paying out 2.7 million and \$3.85 million for building projects for the Service on Aging and Mount Olive's Steele Memorial Library, respectively. Investing \$400, 000 for the fuel farm at the Jetport. Giving \$500, 000 to the Development Alliance. Giving \$250, 000 to the Wayne County Public Schools for money lost from North Carolina's Low Wealth allocation. **Smith** worked out a deal where \$16 million in renovations at Norwayne and Eastern Wayne middle schools were paid for without raising taxes or stepping on anyone's toes, using lottery funds to pay for the principal and local funds to pay the interest, which is later replaced by federal funds. The projects will be complete sometime this year.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The News Argus
March 11, 2012

Smith elected to lead state panel

Author/Byline/Byline: Staff Reports

Wayne County Manager **Lee Smith** has been elected chairman of the state Department of Health and Human Services Waiver Advisory Committee.

The committee works in aiding development of performance and outcome measurements of the new local management entities and of managed care organization members. The 20-member committee is comprised of mental health providers, medical personnel, agency staff who work with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illness and substance abuse challenges, local management entities (LMEs) and managed care organization (MCO) members.

"I'm excited about participating on a committee that will be the catalyst to a better Mental Health provider system to our clients in North Carolina," **Smith** said. "The major directive is to set measurable actions ensuring proper patient care at an affordable cost."

The committee is responsible for reviewing quarterly and annual report summaries of LME-MCO performance; providing consultation around local and statewide system goals; reviewing outcome measures and trending data; and will assist with problem identification and resolution. "Mr. **Smith** is a perfect fit for this position," said Wayne County Commissioner Chairman John Bell. "He was instrumental in pulling the Eastpointe organization together and has expanded it from four counties to 12 counties."

Bell said that **Smith's** outstanding job as Wayne County's manager and as chair of Eastpointe has gained him recognition and respect throughout the state. "He's known to be well-organized, likable, fiscally conservative, while having the ability to get things done," Bell said.

Smith has been the Wayne County manager for the past 10 years.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Mount Olive Tribune (NC)
September 22, 2011

Commissioners discuss Eastpointe merger, approve new hazard plan

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

Wayne County Manager **Lee Smith** briefed county officials on work being done that will combine three health care Managed Care Organizations during Tuesday's meeting of the county commissioners. Wayne County MCO provider is Eastpointe, which also serves Duplin, Lenoir, and Sampson counties.

Smith said the state has required many of the MCOs across the state to merge, resulting in fewer organizations that state authorities need to work with. **Smith** Eastpointe is trying to become the lead agent in a merger with the Benson Center, which serves Edgecombe, Greene, Nash, and Wilson counties, and Southeastern Regional, which serves Robeson, Bladen, Scotland, and Columbus counties. Eastpointe has a Medicaid population of 58, 600. The Benson Center serves 51, 168, while Southeastern Regional serves 68, 912.

Smith said the new 12-county organization would be more cost effective and look to stay out of "owning and maintaining buildings" to cut down on overhead. "Statewide, they are looking to trim the number of MCOs to seven or eight," **Smith** said.

Another benefit of the managed care merger approach is that the new organization can re-invest any money it saves. "In the old system, all the money that was left at the end of the year went back to the state," **Smith** said. "We are also not required to have programs that work well in one area, but not another. We might find it works well in Lumberton, but not needed here, and vice versa." The new group is hoping to be formed by Jan. 1, 2013. Based on today's figures, the Medicaid population base total would be 178, 680, with an available Medicaid funding pocketbook of \$40 million.

Smith assured the commissioners that no one would come back looking for money from Wayne County in the event of overspending. He said a recently passed N.C. House Bill does not hold county governments responsible or financially liable for such expenditures. **Smith** said neighboring Johnston County was asked to join the new configuration, but has declined, choosing to stay with a partnership that includes Cumberland and Wake counties.

Commissioners approved the Hazard Mitigation Plan following a public hearing where no one spoke up on the issue. The plan outlines in great detail what needs to be done in emergency situations such as floods, thunderstorms, drought, tornadoes, and hurricanes.

No one spoke up during another public hearing on the county's appropriation of \$206, 220 in funding for the Rural Operating Assistance Program. The programs give money for transportation needs for the elderly, disabled, and poor people with medical needs. About \$62, 000 goes for the elderly and disabled, \$36, 00 for an emergency transportation assistance

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

program, \$560, 000 for a rural assistance program for people without public assistance to pay for their transportation needs, and \$28, 000 is geared to the rural general public.

Other topics at the meeting include:

The board approved five people to Goldsboro's Municipal Planning Organization. Residents appointed to the board include J.E. "Pete" Parks, Vicki Simmons, and Ann Ham, all of Goldsboro. LaGrange's Jo Ann Summerlin, of the Wayne County Planning Board, and Cooperative Extension head Kevin Johnson, of Pikeville, were also selected.

Pamela Holt and Angie Boswell were named as primary and secondary agents on Wayne County's Emergency Management team. Wayne recently got approved for individual assistance from FEMA, and many of the money decisions will fall under the authority of Holt and Boswell.

Smith said second notices on property taxes would be mailed to those who appealed their revaluations within two weeks. He said there were about 1, 800 appeals, and that nearly half will see changes when they open their letters. Any appeal beyond that would have to come within 15 days.

The board approved rezoning 29 acres in Pikeville to Residential-Agriculture 20. The land, which the town of Pikeville released to county authority, is owned by Brian Marcoux. Three subdivision plats were approved. They included one lot on the north side of Old Grantham Road owned by Darryl and Karla Thompson; one lot on the east side of Mt. Carmel Church Road that is being developed by Dale Perry, and one lot on the west side of Price Road near N.C. 55 for developer Lynn Davenport.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
August 18, 2011

Board accepts bid for Norwayne and EW projects, turns attention to funding

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

The Wayne County Board of Commissioners took another step forward with building projects at Norwayne and Eastern Wayne elementary schools on Tuesday by agreeing to allow County Manager **Lee Smith** to accept the lowest bid and seek financing options from banks. Monteith Construction's bid of \$14, 535, 000 for both schools earned that company the contract, edging out two other companies by less than \$200. Three firms also bid separately on the two schools as separate projects, but **Smith** said Monteith's bid on both schools was the most cost-effective. The bid came in low enough to include items listed on the project's alternate list, which included \$12, 000 for mobile units at Norwayne and a \$250, 000 update to climate control projects for the school's cafeteria and gymnasium. Eastern Wayne's \$227, 000 climate control project for its gymnasium was also included.

Before Monteith, which has offices in Wilmington and Charlotte, can start, financing has to be arranged. The total bill for both projects is \$16.4 million. **Smith** said the county could now seek \$15 million in Qualified School Bonds. Lottery money and local funds -mostly sales tax receipts - will be used to pay the principal, while federal money can be used to cover the interest, which is about \$750, 000 annually. The county must pay the interest and wait to be reimbursed by the federal government, however. "These reimbursements are on a year-to-year basis, so we have to be prepared if something happens and we don't get reimbursed," **Smith** said. County Attorney Borden Parker said this could save the county \$11.7 million over the term of 14 to 17 years. The bonds have to be sold before December or be forfeited. The county then has a three year three year period to spend the proceeds and complete the project.

Smith said he originally planned to seek bank financing and get approval from the Local Government Commission in November, but because of fluctuating rates, he decided it would be best to do it in September. "There will still be some funds remaining from the lottery money, and I've advised (Superintendent) Dr. Stephen Taylor to allocate it for a solid project to protect it," **Smith** said. Both Eastern Wayne and Norwayne will have old structures demolished, and new twostory classrooms built. The county will use school buildings and property as collateral. Then, the county will lease the buildings and land to the schools until construction warranties expire. **Smith** said the county did not have put up collateral for its last three school projects. A public hearing on the resolution to seek Qualified School Construction Bonds is in the works. Commissioner John Bell asked **Smith** if there was a sales tax advantage if the county owned the schools. **Smith** said the checks and balances are such that it would likely not make sense.

Other topics at the meeting included: · New Wayne County Cooperative Extension Director Kevin Johnson spoke to the board about having his new title and also the title of Crops Agent. **Smith** said that one man cannot do both jobs, and that farmers in the area have bombarded him about the importance of a Crops Agent. The county pays 75 percent of the crops

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agent's salary. Johnson said the state has not filled the position in part due to its 12.3 percent cut, and that 80 vacant positions have not been filled. The board is sending a request letter to fill the position to North Carolina State University, legislators, and other key parties. **Smith** said the county sends \$30, 000 annually for the position, and asked the board to consider paying the entire salary.

- **Smith** distributed new literature to the board concerning the policy of naming county properties and facilities.
- **Smith** told the board that the Wayne County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan it approved in June was approved by the N.C. Office of Emergency Management and FEMA. The delay in getting it approved was because the city of Goldsboro was not included. Goldsboro is now included, joining Mount Olive, Fremont, Pikeville, Eureka, Walnut Creek, and Seven Springs.
- The board approved a fireworks demonstration in Pikeville on Sept. 10.
- **Smith** said a Veteran's Medical Clinic would be established in Goldsboro. "With the many veterans in the area, this is great news," he said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Mount Olive Tribune (NC)
June 9, 2011

Citing shortfalls, Wayne plans to raise taxes
Proposed budget for 2011-12 includes 2.35-cent tax hike
Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

The price of living in Wayne County is going up. County Manager **Lee Smith** is asking taxpayers to dig deeper. There is a 2.35 cent increase in the 2011-12 budget that county commissioners got to look at for the first time on Tuesday. The increase would provide and additional \$1.3 million for the county's coffers. A person with a property value of \$100, 000 would pay an additional \$23.50 annually. **Smith** said it would pay for future debt service.

Smith has several big ticket items on the table, including \$15 million for projects at Norwayne and Eastern Wayne middle schools, \$13.8 million to renovate a building on William Street for the Health Department, \$3.5 million for Wayne Community College, \$3.85 million for Mount Olive's library renovation and a new senior citizen's building in Goldsboro.

The Commissioners, who didn't have time to read the budget in its entirety, didn't question the tax hike. They will quiz **Smith** on it on Monday at 8:30 in the commissioner's room on the fourth floor of the courthouse. "The \$1.3 million can be accounted with the \$450, 000 we need for social services, balance." Many residents are also getting socked with property tax increases via revaluation.

Every residence and all but a few businesses in Goldsboro have been mailed revaluations. They won't start paying the new rates until September. The \$158 million budget keeps a hiring freeze for "non-essential employees," cuts service hours at the libraries, could delay response time by law enforcement, and will mean longer waits at health and human services. "The state continues to cost shift to county governments," **Smith** said. "Our focus remains on providing high quality service, provided in a professional manner and as The price of living in Wayne County is going up.

County Manager **Lee Smith** is asking taxpayers to dig deeper. There is a 2.35 cent increase in the 2011-12 budget that county commissioners got to look at for the first time on Tuesday. The increase would provide and additional \$1.3 million for the county's coffers. A person with a property value of \$100, 000 would pay an additional \$23.50 annually. **Smith** said it would pay for future debt \$250, 000 in health costs, loss of lottery money and state retirement," **Smith** said. "Just these are 2.35 cents. We can't even do these without going into the reserve fund "The \$1.3 million can be accounted with the \$450, 000 we need for social services, \$250, 000 in health costs, loss of lottery money and state retirement.. the state continues to cost shift to county governments." quickly as possible. "**Smith** said that while he felt Wayne County was in good shape, it was being cautious. "The outlook for the county's financial condition can be characterized as cautiously optimistic as we see the first signs of what is expected to be a recovery," he said. "While some revenue sources are experiencing flat or declining revenues,

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

others are showing early signs of improvement. We cannot be sure if or when revenue growth will return to historical levels if every, which makes planning for the future speculative and maintenance of reserve funds even more critical at this time." After **Smith** delivered the proposed budget, he was confronted with another problem, Senate Bill 756, which would require all persons placed in jail to come up with a 15 percent bond payment. **Smith** said passage of the bill would fill the jail in no time. "We'll have 300 to 350 (inmates) by late summer, and at \$50 to \$75 per day, we will have to build a new jail," he said. "We had that planned in the next 7 to 10 years, but not this soon.

Smith said it would cost about \$75 million for a jail to house 500 prisoners. "The day reporting centers and electronic devices work, and it's a lot cheaper," **Smith** said. Our local legislators get it, but four legislators in the western part of the state have stonewalled us. "The debt service for a new jail is \$3 to \$3.5 million a year, which by itself is a 12 cent tax increase. We're not talking about violent criminals here, either. A jail bond issue would put our capital improvement plan on its head."

Wayne County Sheriff Carey Winders, who has gone four years without having money for a new deputy in the county's budget, said he's out of room already. "We have 245 people today and a facility that should hold 200," Winders said. "If misdemeanor offenders are kept in jail it will go out the roof. There's also no federal or state money for meth lab cleanups, so it will be up to us to pay that cost."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
January 13, 2011

Wayne Co. manager asks commissioners to hold off on new building plans

Author/Byline: Michael Jaenicke

Wayne County Manager **Lee Smith** has saved taxpayers plenty of money over the last five years via creative financing, aggressively seeking grants and knowing how to form partnerships. Through it all, progress has been made. Now, it appears as if **Smith** is holding back. At the last County Commissioner meeting he told the board to put a temporary hold on plans for a new building for the Health Department and Services on Aging. The move came just before the board was to put its stamp on a \$838,480 architectural contract.

Smith's concerns were the state's sluggish economy and a projected \$3.7 billion budget gap. While Wayne County's unemployment rate was 8.5 percent, statewide it stood at 9.9 percent. Fifty-two of 100 counties have double-digit numbers. And hardly any talk about money is done in 2011 without mentioning the Republicans as a new force in Congress, which was a Democratic majority for the past two years. "I just came back from a conference and the forecast doesn't look promising," he said in taking the building off the docket. "I am talking May or June. I'm afraid to sign any contracts starting a project. This is a \$13 to \$14 million project. I've been pushing for this but I will tell you I am fearful until I see what the state economy and state budget is going to do. I'd rather hold off."

As usual, **Smith** was trying to make something better and also save money. His department's plan was to renovate the Mason's Department Store on North Walnut Street in Goldsboro. The \$13 to \$14 million project looked like a bargain compared to building one for \$40 to \$45 million from the ground up. So a year of talking up the plan now sends it to the back burner.

But **Smith** didn't back off a long ago proposed plan to spend \$15 million for capital improvements at Norwayne Middle and Eastern Wayne middle schools. The \$15 million plan is divided equally between Eastern Wayne Middle and Norwayne Middle schools. The plan in Pikeville is to build a two-story classroom, air-controlled gymnasium and renovate the current cafeteria. The plan at Eastern Wayne calls for a two-story classroom and administrative building, and air-controlled kitchen and gymnasium. But the bonds must be sold by Dec. 31. The county will then have three years to complete the projects. Commissioners plan to visit each school later this month.

Most people in the Norwayne district have heard expansion talk so much they've become "doubting Thomas" about whether it will ever be done. Talks about it started at the county level in 2006. Norwayne Middle has more than 1,100 students and is the biggest and most crowded school in Wayne County. Additionally, Norwayne was built on a flood plane, and there has been talk about constructing a building on higher ground the school owns. Both schools have buildings that are aged and in need of repair/demolition. The system is still hurting from projects last year at Brodgen Primary, Mount Olive Middle and Greenwood Middle.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne County Superintendent Steven Taylor also showed concerns about the economy. He's worried about jobs being sliced. But the plan is to begin construction in the spring and have it completed within a year. Taylor said his system is already down 100 positions, and fearful of what 5 to 15 percent cuts in the budget will do to his staff. About \$4 million was cut from his state budget the past two years. "We've been told our state agencies will take a share of the hit and education is a big part of that," Taylor said. "Any way you slice it, when you cut personnel, you cut services to children, and it makes remaining personnel you have do everything they can to get the job done." But Taylor remains optimistic about the building projects and the collaboration they have with county officials.

Commission Andy Anderson said money was tight and warned school officials about adding "padding" to the two projects.

Smith saved the county \$750, 000 to \$800, 000 in interest that will be reimbursed by the federal government. **Smith** seems to think the bid process and sale of bonds will move rapidly.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News Argus
May 5, 2010

County bond rating goes up
Author/Byline: Steve Herring

Wayne County could realize millions of dollars in interest savings in coming years and find itself more attractive to economic development as the result of action by Standard and Poor's Rating Services. County officials were notified late Friday that S&P has raised its long-term rating on the county's general obligation debt from "A+" to "AA-." "It is hard for me to believe in the hard economic times we are going through that we have had a bond (rating) increase," county commission Chairman Jack Best said during the board's Tuesday session. It is the first such increase in at least 25 to 30 years, County Manager **Lee Smith** said.

"It shows that the county, county management, county board and finance people have done a great job," said consultant Robert High, vice president of Davenport and Co. and past secretary of the N.C. Local Government Commission, during a telephone interview. "They have been fiscally responsible. They have maintained the financial health, in fact have improved the financial health of the county, which is all for the betterment of the residents of Wayne County. "It's hard to put absolute terms on a bond upgrade. For one thing, it should be something that the folks of Wayne County should be proud of. I think it is very helpful to the businesses in the community. It gives them, and should give them, comfort that they are not going to be caught with any surprises from their government trying to dig out of a hole, so to speak. I think from a business standpoint a rating is also good for industrial recruitment for the same reason -- it shows stability and strength in the government." The upgrades do not happen by chance, High said. "Upgrades are not freely available, they are rare. I don't know that you ever anticipate an upgrade, especially in a down economy."

An upgrade also brings benefits, just like a higher credit score benefits the consumer, High added. "From a credit standpoint, the better your credit rating, as with individuals, you should be able to borrow money at a lower cost and the availability of credit in a tight credit market is improved. The benefits are many. The benefit is more derived from the reasons that they got the upgrade -- the fact that the government is well managed and you don't have tax rates bouncing up and down. It is consistently managed. So they are able to step up and help in bad times."

Smith called the news, "a dream come true." "We know we have capital programs in the future," he said. "This shows that we are stable. Companies that invest in areas look at things like this because they want to go to areas where you have secure services. Also, in future interest this saves us money. This will save us millions of dollars over the coming years."

Reading from the S&P report, Best said the rating reflected the county's:

- * Continued growth and diversification of the local economy
- * Strong financial management and growth in the level of the general fund balance reserves
- * Low overall debt burden and rapid amortization of debt.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The report cited the county's consistent "sound financial operations which have contributed to consecutive operating surpluses since 2003." In particular it noted the 2007 unreserved fund balance of \$22.9 million or 27.1 percent of expenditures. By 2009 the balance had grown to \$26.5 million or 31.7 percent.

The growing fund balance has been a favorite target of critics of the board. "In the past we have been criticized for the fund balance," **Smith** said. "What are people going to say if we grow fund balance? The story is we stuck to it because it is fact, you have got to have it to survive."

Smith said the county knows it will have future debt and is preparing for it, adding that rating agencies are looking at how that is being done. "A lot of things, including the economy, are out of the county's control, but you can prepare for it," he said. "Commissioners have allowed us by hiring the right experts, putting the policies in place, putting reserves in place -- we were prepared for the downturn. We are weathering it, but we have a long way to go." **Smith** also had high praise for Pam Holt, the county finance officer. A number of other factors have played into the county's economic picture, **Smith** said.

"Our saving grace has been the state, by virtue of Cherry Hospital, the federal government with Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, and growing manufacturing in the area -- AT&T, AAR," **Smith** said. "I think that to me validates the investment we have made in economic development and the investment we made in things like WORK Keys because that has produced jobs, and if you have a good stable labor market the positions are going to come and they have started coming. I think those things have put us over the top."

Also of importance is the new U.S. 70 Bypass that is under construction that will connect to Interstate 795 that connects to Interstate 95. "Business and industry coming to our community should say that this is a community that is stable and growing and that is reasonable in what they charge and how they do business," he said. "This is positive all the way around."

The county has been able to diversify and the goal is to be even more diversified, he said. "That is what the Wayne County Development Alliance is working on, the chamber," **Smith** said. "So you don't worry about one single industry that closes their doors tomorrow that would shut you down. We have been able to suffer through economic hits and loss of jobs."

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News Argus
August 13, 2009

Smith told Price to hold off on hearings

Author/Byline: Steve Herring

Wayne County Planning Director Connie Price might have been hesitant Tuesday night to say who told him not to schedule community meetings to discuss zoning, as had been ordered by the county Planning Board. But County Manager **Lee Smith** had no such problem. "I told him," **Smith** said Wednesday. The issue came up after Planning Board member Steve Keen reminded fellow board members that they had agreed to hold a series of public meetings starting with one on the U.S. 70 Bypass interchange at Wayne Memorial Drive. The meetings were to gather public input and interest in zoning. Keen asked Price if he had scheduled the meetings and Price replied he had been told not to but declined to say who ordered him to hold off.

At issue, **Smith** said, is the danger of zoning being confused with a multitude of other issues currently facing commissioners. In addition, county commissioners need to be aware of what the Planning Board would be sending out beforehand, he said. **Smith** said it was not an attempt to censor the Planning Board, but rather to allow commissioners to be aware of what was going on when people began calling about the meeting. The Planning Board's first attempt at having a zoning meeting earlier this year was the victim of such confusion, he said.

The original concept was to have a series of meetings across the county starting in the areas along U.S. 70 west at Rosewood and the U.S. 70 Bypass and Wayne Memorial Drive interchange.

A brewing controversy over the Goldsboro Municipal Planning Organization erupted prior to the start of the meetings. The meetings were canceled out of concern that the issue of zoning would be lost in the confusion. Conditions are ripe for the same problems to develop again, **Smith** said. "I am concerned there are a lot of issues out there," **Smith** said. He cited the lingering MPO uproar, possible changes in the subdivision and mobile home ordinances and zoning. "There are a lot of irons in the fire," he said. "I said (to Price) let's be clear (about the issues). I am telling you not to do this now. Let's get these other issues out of the way and settled. "I have no authority over the Planning Board, but I do over the planning staff."

There has been a lot of "mixing" of the issues, he said. As such, he added, it is important to get good information to people and not waste their time. "They need to be educated on the subject matter," he said. "It is as simple as that. Also, the commissioners need to at least know what is going on. They are going to get calls and they are going to be in the dark. I am telling you right now we need to keep the issues separated."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The News Argus
August 11, 2009

County manager vows to help schools

Author/Byline: Phyllis Moore

Stepping out of his role of county manager Monday night, **Lee Smith** made a commitment to Wayne County Board of Education to enlist an army of volunteers for the school system.

A parent himself, **Smith** took on the mantle after serving as a test proctor at his daughter's school in the spring. Witnessing some of the students' frustration in being able to finish the tests struck a chord with him, he said. "It was obvious they were not going to make it," he said. "I left there very upset, very concerned. ... What I saw in talking with some of the staff was the frustration of the teachers, though they have these kids seven, eight hours a day, nine months a year."

While parents have the most important job in the world raising a child, teachers are in second position, **Smith** said. "They influence our children, but they have got a disadvantage also. They become parents for eight hours a day," he said.

There's a question bandied about the county commission when challenges present themselves, the county manager said -- "What am I going to do about it?" **Smith** said he took the question to heart and decided to take action. "What I'm about to tell you is nothing new," he told the board. "It's no great idea. It happens every day." Mentors and tutoring are needed in the school system, experts say -- to provide individual attention that the teachers often can't give. **Smith** proposed the "local government volunteer partnership," starting with the county staff, volunteering and being trained for the job. "Every one of my county commissioners have made a commitment" to do that already, **Smith** said. Since, a total of 30 volunteers have stepped forward. "My goal is 100," **Smith** said. "I want to exceed that goal. We have all volunteered to give our time."

If it takes a village to raise a child, then who better to set the example than its leaders? "We have to take care of our children by giving them an opportunity," **Smith** said, citing something he recently heard schools superintendent Dr. Steven Taylor say at a seminar -- "Children must have at least one person who believes in them." A few volunteers will make a dent, but many can make all the difference. **Smith** said he has made a commitment to "go after 100 folks," but added he is confident the number could exceed that. In addition to the commission and county staff, he expanded his challenge to include the City of Goldsboro and outlying areas -- Mount Olive, Fremont, Pikeville -- "because everybody has a talent, to go into our schools." It's time for the community to step up, **Smith** continued, because the school board cannot do it alone. "It's put up or shut up time for this community. I mean it," he said. "We're committing our staff to take time, mentoring takes a lot of time, training. You're talking making a commitment to a child long-term." **Smith** said he envisions providing training for the volunteers, and at the outset mentors will be assigned to the middle schools.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

School board members were appreciative of the suggestion. Board member Shirley Sims praised **Smith's** decision. "Today you have taken the charge and the challenge. If we could get others who have made such negative comments (about the schools) ... because you're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem," she said.

Board member Thelma Smith also thanked **Smith** for his stance. "What you did is what we have been trying to ask all along," she said. "We know we work hard -- our teachers, our staff, our superintendent. The next piece has been just what you told us." Many in the community have not set foot in the schools, so can't claim to understand the problems, she said. It would be nice if they could "see for yourself" like **Smith** did, she said. "By you speaking tonight, I'm sure there's going to be other groups in the area who are going to follow suit."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News Argus
July 9, 2009

Manager to county: Freeze my salary, too

Author/Byline: Steve Herring

When County Manager **Lee Smith** compiled the 2009-10 budget that was approved last month he did not include any salary increases for county employees or for himself, even though his contract with the county provides for an annual increase of 5 percent.

Smith's salary is \$160,416 and he receives \$12,000 annually for travel. According to data compiled by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, **Smith** is among 14 managers statewide who are paid a base salary of between \$150,000 to \$175,000. **Smith** oversees a \$157.6 million budget and more than 800 full-time employees and a total workforce of close to 1,000 when part-time help is included.

In a letter dated May 1, **Smith** wrote to commission Chairman Bud Gray that, "Due to economic and budget conditions, I am hereby requesting the clause within the employment agreement between me and the County of Wayne determining an annual increase for my position be halted for fiscal year 2009/2010. Due to the fact the county will be unable to give raises to county employees; I feel strongly that I should fall under the same guidelines/restrictions. I appreciate your support and look forward to a time when Wayne County can continue to grow."

Smith said he only decided to publicly comment on the letter after rumors surfaced that he had received a raise. "Otherwise I would have said nothing because I did not think it was deemed worthy," he said. "I just wanted it to be quiet. I did not want to come across like I was trying to be a martyr. "I asked a couple of board members about it and they said that is 'your call, we have a legal binding contract with you,' a five-year agreement."

Another rumor, he said, was that the agreement provided for a five-year severance package. "It is a one-year severance deal," he said. "If I am fired for something criminal, or for negligence, I don't get paid anything. I am not a county employee. I work by statute at the pleasure of the board of county commissioners. I can be fired for parting my hair wrong. "The board gave me a contract, they came in here and renewed my contract at their behest. They said, 'It makes us feel better and we want you to feel good about the job and not feel politically pressured every single day.' That gives you at least a feeling that your board is supportive."

County employees have policy and law behind them, **Smith** said. "The rights given to a county employee, I do not enjoy," he said. "They are by statute at the pleasure of the board. But they (employees) have forewarning and all of these other policies that we create. I don't. So the board was kind enough to do that and put it (a contract) together." The contract spells out the travel allowance and insurance. **Smith** receives all benefits provided full-time employees. The county provides at no cost medical and dental insurance for **Smith** and his family and at least a 5 percent annual contribution to **Smith's** 401K plan. **Smith** said he had received a call from the county's

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

human resources department that someone wanted a copy of the contract. "I told them to tell the person to call up (to his office) and that (a copy) is 10 cents a page," he said. "It is pretty easy. It is not a secret. There is nothing to hide. The rumor is that it has been asked for and that we have refused to provide a copy.

"I have asked the clerk to the board of commissioners and my assistant if there has ever been a request in my eight years for my agreement. No. It has never been asked for." **Smith** provided a copy of the two-page contract dated Jan. 1, 2008. In the contract **Smith** waives his rights of confidentiality concerning the agreement and notes that "to that end authorizes the disclosure of this agreement and its entry upon the board's minutes."

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners recently released data it collected from the state's 100 counties concerning salaries. According to the data Wayne County has a population of 114,000 and approximate valuation (2007-08) in millions of \$5,603.

The commission chairman receives \$11,838 annually and board members \$9,613. Commissioner Jack Best does not accept any of the pay or benefits, **Smith** said. "If there are other things that we attend or go to, if there is a cost associated with it, he reimburses us," **Smith** said. "He tries to pay in advance if he can, but sometimes that is hard to do. "He is in a position to do that and does not fault others who don't. He looks at it as he is serving the public and he wants to do that and that is pretty admirable. Not everybody can do that. He has done it since the day he got on."

Information was unavailable for eight counties in the data compiled by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. Another, Onslow, had a vacant manager's office when the information was gathered.

Managers' salaries range from a low of \$30,384 in coastal Tyrell County to \$215,656, plus another \$12,149 in travel in Mecklenburg County. Wake County is a close second at \$214,127 plus \$6,000 in travel.

Commissioners' salaries range from lows of \$450 per meeting for the chairman and \$150 for members in Tyrell County to a high of \$27,962 plus \$3,528 in travel for the chairman and \$22,370 plus \$3,528 in travel for members in Mecklenburg County.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News Argus
December 28, 2008

County manager looks ahead to 2009

Author/Byline: Steve Herring

There is not a lot to be optimistic about in a downward-spiraling economy that is still trying to find the bottom of the barrel. But Wayne County Manager **Lee Smith** is hopeful that steps taken over the past several years will help insulate the county from the worst of the freefall and allow it to keep projects, such as the \$23 million school facilities plan, on target. **Smith** also views the county budget's health as validation of commissioners' efforts to increase the county's fund balance in the face of criticism. He balances his optimism that the county will not only weather the financial crisis, and may even be able to garner some benefit, with deep concerns over what could be slash-and-burn tactics in Raleigh as legislators raid funds to cover a \$3 billion budget shortfall. Even with those concerns, **Smith** said commissioners have indicated there will be no property tax increase next year. "When I look at next year's budget I see no increase," he said. "I think we have to stay where we are or less. We made the cuts before 2008 in preparation for not only trying to get ready to borrow money for the jail and schools and those kind of things -- we were preparing ourselves for the future as far as having money."

"I still feel strongly about not using the capital and fund balance for one-time items. It is still for emergencies. I am still very hesitant to go back into the fund balance to pay for operations. Now for this coming year I know commissioners, in their mind are going 'no tax increase.' People are under hard times right now. "So what we did for this year we went revenue neutral and in some cases we went below state forecasts and said 'we don't believe it' (state projections). I did not plan on one extra dime this year in property tax and there is a reason because we didn't think it was going to be there." Some areas, say along the beaches, planned on higher values that have dropped dramatically and now they won't be able to make budget, he said.

The state had promised some \$2.5 million to \$3 million for Medicaid. "No way we were going to get that this year from the state," **Smith** said. "So I counted on a million and if I get \$2 million then great, you are \$1 million ahead of the game, but don't count on it." He added, "Sales tax is down, but you have got to remember we live 90 days in arrears in sales tax so you don't have a real picture yet. I will be real curious to begin seeing in February and March what December looked like. That will be the real test. "We know we will see a downturn. How much, I'm not sure, but we did not count on what the state had said. It could it get worse and if it does I will have to make adjustments on the county budget. We already have frozen jobs, already frozen capital projects. I think we have done the things we can do right now to kind of prepare for this downward shift in revenue." Complicating the economic picture somewhat is the county upcoming property revaluation. **Smith** said some people are concerned about conducting revaluation during an economic downturn. "It could have a negative impact," he said. "But say you get beyond 2011, the board may want to go to four-year (revaluation) cycle if you have an upturn in values because you don't want to live with lower values. You want to value closer to what the market value actually is." **Smith** said the state has depended on capital gains tax

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

revenues for years to balance budget. "They are not going to be there this year," he said. "It is going to be a problem." **Smith** said it is difficult to know what direction the new state leadership will take. "You have got to be prepared for what they pass down to you," he said. "Usually what they pass down to you is usually less in reimbursements, less in funds of any sort, but they will pass on program responsibilities that in the past have been their responsibility. For example, this past year the state required counties to shoulder more of the cost for foster children care. For Wayne County that meant another \$450,000. **Smith** is concerned about what the lawmakers will do and what funds they may take, including lottery proceeds meant for education. That, he said, could affect the county's school facilities plan. "They have got big holes to fill and where are they going to fill it -- they're going to start to look at pots of money," **Smith** said.

The county schools currently have \$6.2 million in lottery proceeds, but the money technically belongs to the state. "I say get it in the schools' checking account," **Smith** said. "Obligate it. I say build Eastern Wayne or Norwayne or a combination with cash tomorrow. Obligate it or we are going to lose it." "Bid it out and let's do that now," he said. "I am urging them (school board) to move quickly because I think they are going to lose it (lottery money). "I think if we borrow \$16 million and hope to use that (lottery) later I think it is going away. Ask counties about the inventory and intangibles (taxes) in the 1980s. The state said 'We'll never take your money.' Now it is gone." Even a supposed break in Medicaid has cost the county. "The state said 'we are going to give you full relief' and then when it passed they took some of my sales tax. We lost hundreds of thousands of dollars over that. Even though we gained, we still lost a revenue source. I think they are going to take it (lottery) because they don't have a choice. They are not going to raise taxes. "The next phase for the school plan is bond money and bond money is not there. It could be several years before the project could be done."

Smith said people have said to him that adding to the fund balance is just a way to get ready for capital projects. "That's true, but we also did it to build and our sustain our credit rating," **Smith** said. "You also want to do it in case of an economic downturn. Well, we are in one. "The thing Wayne County has been able to do over the past few years is to put some money aside."

Meanwhile, numbers from the Health Department and Department of Social Services worry **Smith**. Applications for the Women Infants Children (WIC) program are up by about 25 percent. Food Stamp applications are up as well. "I think our general health visits are up," **Smith** said. "It's not just those that who are poverty stricken who are walking into DSS and Health Department. These are people who just months before were making \$40,000, \$50,000 or \$60,000 and now don't have a job. They are coming to Wayne County going 'I need some help. I don't have health insurance, what do I do?' "We see them because that is our job. County employees are concerned because when there is an economic downturn their production goes up. That is the thing that is so concerning because that is when there is a strain on taxes yet there is more demand on services. I think we have to be real concerned about that." Housing sales are down, foreclosures are up as are job losses, he said. "There is a lot of fear out there," **Smith** said. "We have people here who build things for the automotive industry so we all are kind of standing back holding our breaths about that. When you watch the Congress hearings about GM and Chryslers that affects Wayne County."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The News Argus
October 26, 2008

County surviving economic downturn

Author/Byline: Steve Herring

County Manager **Lee Smith** said Wednesday he has "put the skids" on some county spending. **Smith** said while he remains confident that the county's sound fiscal responsibility over the past several years and its ability to grow its savings have put it in a position to weather the ongoing financial crisis, he is still concerned about news he is hearing from the state. The economic downturn isn't expected to derail the county's plans to put a new \$9.7 million communications system in place, but it is too early to tell if it will impact a planned \$22 million school renovation and building project, he said.

The "skids" include a freeze on hiring of non-essential personnel as well as a delay in some capital purchases until the end of the year to see where the county stands, **Smith** said. There are not that many capital purchases in the budget, items that include computers and vehicles, he said. For instance, the county is looking at shifting vehicles around instead of buying new ones, he said. "In some cases we have to buy new because we have some that are older that are costing us a lot of money," **Smith** said. "It (vehicle purchases) is being looked at on a case-by-case basis and we are doing a cost analysis -- how much does it cost to operate it and maintain it. If we are at a point at which we are losing money we will look at a new vehicle, one that might get better gas mileage and reduce maintenance cost."

The four-day work week the county implemented in August is also a "piece" of the county's savings efforts. "Now we are telling workers 'when you leave your office for a period of time, cut your lights off,'" he said. **Smith** said that might not seem like a lot, but if he saves \$25 a year by turning off the lights in his office and that savings is multiplied by all of the other offices then it "adds up."

Another area of savings has been in a reduction of the number of county employees. Over the past several years, the county has left 123 positions vacant, resulting in a savings of \$2.5 million to \$3 million, **Smith** said. But now employee turnover in the county is at an all-time low, he said. "People are staying put," **Smith** said. "I hope that county employees are fairly satisfied with their job and benefits. We used to have wiggle room in open positions, now it is just not there." **Smith** said he is concerned about what he is hearing about cuts on the state level. Early indications were a \$250 million budget shortfall. **Smith** said he would not be surprised to see a \$1 billion shortfall based on what he has seen.

Gov. Mike Easley has made cuts so that might help some, **Smith** said, and some areas look better than they did a couple of weeks ago. "I think the state will have to look to cut and one of the places I fear is going to be Medicaid," he said. "I have never taken what they (state) said they were going to give me at 100 percent," **Smith** said. "In some cases I cut it in half and say there is no way we are going to get that much. I just never felt that confident about it. I think that will

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

help us if the state decides to start drawing that (Medicaid) back next year. "Also, we planned for this year and next year that our revenues would be flat. No increases. Therefore, if you have extra money you bank it away. You don't spend what you think you might have. You spend what you know you have and save what you have. I think that has helped us this year and that is why I am not as panicked as some. The way a lot of folks fix budgets is that they overestimate revenues and adjust budget at year's end in an audit. We don't do it that way."

"Right now I think we are holding our own and are waiting to see the next sales tax figures," **Smith** said. "We have not seen a major hit yet, but they say we are going to get it. But I think by our projecting flat (revenues) I am hoping that we are kind of prepared for it. "But that does not mean the county can sit back and say it is prepared for it. We have to look for ways to cut back."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Princeton News-Leader (NC)
February 6, 2008

Smith sees more positive tone in county

Author/Byline: Barry Merrill

Wayne County Manager **Lee Smith** had just met with the Carl Best Leadership Group. That hadn't always been one of his favorite meetings. In fact, as he tells it, "I made them mad in 2007." One of the members of that farming community group, Gerald Ballance of Fremont, met with him after that meeting. "You came across very cold," Mr. Ballance reportedly told the county manager.

Mr. Smith asked Mr. Ballance and the group to stand up and make their voice heard. "You have a say so in the community. You've got to tell us what you want in your community." **Mr. Smith** was very excited about what he heard this year as he challenged each one to raise one or two issues. He said 70% of the questions were about schools, reflecting their concerns and the increasing importance of education in farming. He said zoning was one of those subjects that riled many in years past, but today there is growing appreciation of the protection zoning offers farmers and others in the county. He said transportation, both rails and roads, are of concern to many in the county.

Agri-business is not the only ones concerned about schools. The business community has been stepping up, not only seeking improvement but offering how they can help. Business people are having a tough time finding and keeping qualified employees. Recently the county helped fund the Work Keys program, which certifies to employers that applicants have certain work skills necessary to do a job. He said this not only offers certification, but also orients students for skills necessary to be productive employees. School Board Chairman Thelma Smith is concerned about students who choose to drop out of school not finding a positive path in society.

Mr. Smith spoke about a program where Teresa Bayer is working the Judge Braswell and the Wayne County Development Alliance to provide GEDs for substance abusers who are completing rehabilitation and want to work. "We want to get them before they end up in jail and learn things that will make it even harder to turn their lives around." He hopes more mentoring programs can be developed to help meet the needs in the county.

Mr. Smith said that while some of his meetings with citizens have not always been positive, some of his meetings with county employees have not always been positive either. "We've made changes in staff, we've had staff turnover, and we've retrained. Some days people don't like me very much." He says they have been trying to clean their own house, not necessarily trying to find fault, but to find where they need to invest. They're setting measurable objectives in every department, and that's not always easy.

He pointed with some pride to the community's recognition of the need for a new animal shelter, and with the community raising \$600,000, including a \$100,000 anonymous pledge. He

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

mentioned that the fundraising success was earning him a haircut, as he was getting his head buzz-cut in response to a challenge he had issued. He also pointed to Commissioner John Bell taking his time to plant flowers at Goldsboro High School, trying to beautify that school campus as a volunteer. He wanted to make the school look better so people will take more pride in the school.

Mr. **Smith** is concerned about health services. He says while most of us see public health services as just for the poor, there are many in the county who can't afford health insurance, including many working people. Some can't afford the insurance or the deductible. He says the WATCH van services and clinics are vitally important for the county to provide those services. One of the benefits of improved health services is reduction in employee absenteeism, and healthier students do better in school.

Much of the conversation revolved around the recently proposed \$23 million school facility plan, and Mr. **Smith** acknowledged that was just the start of the needs. Finding money to do more school construction, along with a new detention center, buildings for health and DSS, and services for the aging is going to be challenging. "Wayne County can't borrow \$300 million." One of the benefits he sees to help finance will be lowered operating costs in new school buildings.

Eventually the county will need to pass a bond issue, but they need the vote of the people to spend the money. "Their vote will be the authorization to spend the money." Mr. **Smith** says in the six years he has been in Wayne County he's seen changes in the way the community is thinking about things in the county. "It's not the same chatter you used to hear. We're talking about 'what do you want to see better?'"

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
September 27, 2007

Wayne Commissioners plan for growth

Author/Byline: Sarah A. Wise

27 September 2007 - School facilities in the northern end of the county were the hot button issue at the Wayne County Commissioner's Community Meeting at Charles B. Aycock Monday night.

After giving a brief presentation on services the county offers to all of its citizens, County Manager **Lee Smith** addressed questions that citizens had written and submitted before the meeting began. And while the topic ran the gamut from ditches to recreational services, the biggest issue on most people's mind was how soon schools will be expanded in northern Wayne County. Darron Flowers of Fremont asked why the county was just now looking at school facilities when growth and overcrowding issues have been apparent for years.

Mr. **Smith** explained that the county has had several big projects that also need their attention and money, and that they cannot just favor one project over the other. "As a taxpayer myself, I want to know what the payment on the building is, as well as the operational cost," he said. "I want to know how building is going to affect the tax rate."

Another problem, he said, was getting information on not just what it will cost to build additional structures at a particular school, but also the cost of maintaining that structure. "We are just now getting estimates on operational costs for the proposed school projects in the county," he said. "We have gotten that, and sent it back to the school board for revisions, and we're meeting with our financial advisors about it."

He also said that the county is composing a prioritized list of all county projects is in the works now, including either an expanded or a new jail facility, as well as consolidated library facilities in the northern and southern ends of the county. "We don't want to promise you that a high school is going to get built a certain year, and then when that year gets there, we can't go any longer without a new jail," he said. "The local government commission won't let you build that much at one time, you have to spread it out. So we're trying to get a handle on everything we're trying to do."

Later in the meeting, Mr. **Smith** addressed a similar question on addressing classroom space in the county, and dealing with overcrowded schools in some areas while having open space in others. He said that, while he knows it is controversial, the schools have been asked to look at things like reassignment and year-round school. They are also examining the possibility of setting county-wide rules limiting the amount of mobile units schools can have before they must build more classrooms at the school. "We have asked the school board to look at all the ways that we can utilize the schools better," he said, "and you can't do that without looking at some difficult options." He said that in addition to adding classroom space, the board also has to look at what he calls the core of the school - facilities like cafeterias, media centers, and athletic facilities. He said that the capacity to increase the core must be there before more classroom

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

space is added. Mr. Flowers asked where exactly the county was in building schools. "Not to be disrespectful, but can you tell us when you are going to be able to build at each of the schools?" he said. While he stopped short of putting exact years on construction, Mr. **Smith** did say that in the prioritized list from the school, building an additional building at Norwayne is second or third on the list, while building more space at CBA is sixth. He added that plans for a two-story educational classroom were in the works for Norwayne.

Vance Greeson of Pikeville then asked if American Disabilities Act (ADA) would be met in the two story structure, including putting an elevator in. Mr. **Smith** said the building would have to meet those standards to be approved.

School board member Dave Thomas, who also attended the meeting, added a little perspective to the situation in Northern Wayne County. "The high school has 1220 students right now," he said. "They have 305 students per lunch period in the original cafeteria built in 1961. There are 13 mobile units, and ten teachers without classrooms." He also said that Aycock is the only high school in the county that only has one feeder school, and that he felt the need for a second middle school was on the horizon. Pikeville Mayor Herb Sieger asked why the county was committing money to libraries he didn't think were pressing, because there are already facilities in both Pikeville and Fremont, when schools so clearly need to be built.

Mr. **Smith** said that the county is working on a five-year plan and a 10-year plan for all county projects, and that it would be unfair to dismiss any needed projects. He also referred Mr. Sieger to library director Jane Rustin for more information on the libraries.

The school discussion ended with an emphasis on a proposed quarter-percent sales tax in the county that could be used to generate revenue for schools. "We've heard from a lot of people that they would rather see the sales tax than a proposed land transfer tax," he said, "and we think that would generate more revenue." He encouraged citizens to contact the commissioners with their thoughts on the tax, and thanked them for all their input during the meeting.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Wayne-Wilson News Leader (Fremont, NC)
May 25, 2006

Medicaid costs put county in a bind. Wayne seeking Medicaid spending cap
Author/Byline: Reggie Ponder

The Wayne County Board of Commissioners wants the public to understand the bind that the county is in because of Medicaid costs. The commissioners held a work session on Medicaid costs at their meeting Tuesday. The focus of the work session was informing the public about the Medicaid situation. County Manager **Lee Smith** told the commissioners that county officials needed to watch the legislative short session "like a hawk." The legislators have a tough job because they have to find funding, he said. "The spiraling costs of Medicaid are crippling counties' ability to fund education such as school construction, teachers and classroom needs," according to a printed report that Mr. **Smith** presented to the commissioners. "Wayne County spends more for Medicaid than for school facilities." He said that Medicaid was a good program, but that the state-mandated payments were getting out of control. "There's a balance that we've got to find," **Mr. Smith** said. "And as commissioners, you've got a tough job ahead of you." Medicaid will cost county taxpayers more than \$7.5 million next year. That's a 77 percent increase since 2000.

The report indicated that 21.9 percent of the county's residents were Medicaid eligible, that 13 cents of the county's tax rate pays the county's mandated share of Medicaid, and that 9.1 percent of the county's current budget is required for Medicaid. The N.C. Association of County Commissioners' goal is the passage of legislation to implement a six-year phaseout of county participation in the costs of Medicaid. The association also wants the General Assembly to cap county costs at the fiscal year 2004-2005 level and provide relief by targeting supplemental financial assistance to any county in which more than a specified percent of the population is eligible for Medicaid. According to the association of county commissioners, the state has five counties that spend more on Medicaid than for their public schools current expense. Half the state's counties spend more on Medicaid than for public school construction and other capital expenses. Commissioner Wilbur "Andy" Anderson said that Monday's work session was mostly to get the word out to the public. "This is a big issue," Mr. **Smith** said. Projected Medicaid cost in the county is \$18 million by 2018, Mr. Anderson said. Officials need to work together as a team to resolve the issue, he said. "I don't know what the answer is," Mr. Sager said. But requiring Medicaid recipients to pay part of the bill, or changing eligibility requirements, might help. Illegal immigrants also are placing a burden on the Medicaid system, he said.

Mr. Sager said that he didn't want to deny care to anyone. He said that he just wanted to find a better way to handle it. He said that he was concerned about those on Medicaid, but that he also was concerned about those whose incomes are barely above the Medicaid eligibility levels and who can't get care. Mr. **Smith** said that county officials needed to remain engaged with state legislators as the General Assembly works on the Medicaid issue. Mr. Anderson said that he agreed with Mr. Sager's concern about those just above the Medicaid eligibility levels. Mr. **Smith** said that he and the commissioners received emails and telephone calls from families

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

in the \$23,000-\$35,000 income range who say, "I'm dying." They are caught in a squeeze because they don't receive Medicaid and related services and are supporting those that do. In other matters, the board proclaimed May as "Mental Health Month." County Manager **Lee Smith** said that if anyone had a complaint or issue with mental health services, to call 731-1133 and ask for "customer service" - "that is a brand new thing now across the state" - to report to Eastpointe Mental Health Services. "If something is going well we'd like to know that, too," he said. The board also proclaimed May as "Volunteer Month." The board unanimously awarded the banking services contract to BB&T on the staff's recommendation. Mr. **Smith** said that the finance office staff had done an excellent job reviewing the bids. Goldsboro attorney Phil Baddour was appointed to the U.S. Highway 70 Corridor Commission. Mr. **Smith** was appointed to the Wayne County Development Alliance, Inc. Board of Directors. Mr. Anderson said that the county was beginning to see results of improvements to infrastructure. The county commissioners need to continue working with county citizens and keep them involved, he said. "The sky's the limit in Wayne County," Mr. Anderson said. "I think we've got a very, very good future ahead of us." The Wayne County Board of Commissioners plans a bold effort to lobby the state legislature to cap county Medicaid spending and overturn a stringent environmental regulation.

During the commissioners' briefing Tuesday, held just before the regular board meeting, County Manager **Lee Smith** said that a "myriad of bills" had been proposed for addressing the county portion of Medicaid funding. "It will be a daily monitoring," he said of the county's role in watching the General Assembly. Capping county funding of Medicaid would help with local budget issues, he said. Commissioner Munroe "Jack" Best blasted a recent increase in nitrogen runoff fees for developers. The fees, imposed administratively through a state regulatory agency, have increased from \$11 per pound to \$57 per pound of nitrogen. Mr. Best said that for one potential project, the cost increased from \$109,000 to \$634,000. He said that the nitrogen runoff regulations could stifle development in Wayne County. "If you're in the development business, this is a deal-breaker," Mr. Best said. "This is a deterrent to anybody to come to Wayne County because they can't afford it." The issue is job creation, Mr. Best said. The projects that the county has been working on could mean a thousand new jobs for the county, he said. "You've got a board up there that's made up of environmentalists and tree-huggers," said Borden Parker, county attorney.

The fees only affect counties in the Neuse River Basin. Mr. Best and Mr. **Smith** said that the Neuse Basin counties needed to present a unified front on the issue at the General Assembly next week. Many Neuse Basin boards of commissioners and economic development groups don't understand the issue yet, Mr. **Smith** said. "Everybody's just not jumping up and down on this, and this is a killer," Mr. **Smith** said. He said that the General Assembly needed to overturn the administrative rule. The board resumed discussion of the issue later on during the regular board meeting. "This is an absolute death notice for us," Mr. **Smith** said during the meeting. He said that protecting waterways was important, but that there needed to be some balance. "That has got to be fixed," he said. Mr. **Smith** said that monitoring the legislature would be a constant task during the session. "We've got to be vigilant until the very last second," he said.

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William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News Argus
April 24, 2005

County must make budget decisions

Author/Byline: Barbara Arntsen

For the past three years, County Manager **Lee Smith** has squeezed every penny the county spends and cut 7 percent of the county's labor force to keep from using money from savings. **Smith** and the county commissioners have managed to keep the general fund at a little over \$18 million, while still providing necessary services to the public. But keeping the general fund at a level amount won't allow the county to accomplish long-term projects like building new schools, repairing and expanding water and sewer systems and providing quality health care services.

To adequately prepare for the future, the county has to add to its savings. That means the commissioners will have some tough decisions to make during budget talks this year. Can they add to the county's coffers to prepare for the future without cutting services or increasing taxes? When **Smith** began his job as county manager in 2002, he found that the county had reduced its general fund balance by almost \$12 million over the previous three years. And, **Smith** said, the 2002 expenditures were already over the budget projections.

Working with the finance office, **Smith** cut county expenditures by \$6.2 million between February and June 2002, thereby substantially reducing the amount of money the county would have to take from its savings. Through the budget reductions, he said, the county only had to take about \$3 million from the general fund that year, instead of the projected \$9 million. "My goal then was to look at why there was such a drain on the fund balance and figure out how to stop it," he said. **Smith** said that fund balances in all counties grew in the late 1990's because state reimbursements for various programs, like Medicaid and Medicare, were always coming in well over budget estimates. Those hefty reimbursements stopped by 2000, and counties were then faced with offering more health services with less money.

Smith looked at the county's audit figures over a 10-year period and found that expenditures were growing an average of around \$6 million per year. Revenue growth was not keeping up with expenditures, he said. That trend, **Smith** said, had to be reversed or the county would end up in financial trouble. "If you use your savings to buy groceries, or to pay the light bill, eventually you're going bankrupt," he said. Revaluation of county property added almost \$3 million to the county's revenues, he said, which helped offset the original \$9.5 million over budget expenses. So, when planning for the next year's budget, he budgeted to use \$4.2 million from fund balance, knowing the county would have to bring in revenues equal to that amount or risk draining its savings even more. "By the next year we had brought in revenues to cover that amount, plus we added \$25,000," he said. **Smith** said that adding \$25,000 wasn't much in terms of "growing the fund balance" but said his goal had been to break even for that first year.

For the last two years, the county has kept its fund balance even at \$18.2 million by reducing general fund expenditures by 13 percent, cutting labor by 7 percent and increasing tax collection

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

rates by almost 2 percent. A budget that once ballooned at \$96 million is now at \$83.5 million. By maintaining the fund balance and reducing expenditures, the county was able to maintain its A+ rating when reviewed in 2004 by Standard & Poors. Standard & Poors is an international company that provides independent credit ratings, risk evaluation, investment research, data, and valuations for government and corporations.

That A+ rating will help the county get the lowest interest rates when borrowing money, but the fund balance also has to increase to accomplish the projects facing the county. "The more debt that you have, the more savings you must have," **Smith** explained. "Three years ago we were \$9.5 million off budget, which is 18 cents on the tax rate," **Smith** said. "Now, at year's end, we're very close to projected expenses."

Wayne County meets the state requirements for the money in its general fund, but is on the low end of what the state recommends. "We're required to have at least \$13 million in there by the Local Government Commission," said **Smith**. "But they would like us to have between \$18 to \$22 million."

What the recommended budget will be for the county for 2005-2006 is still not known, because **Smith** and his staff are still meeting with department heads to hammer out the needs. And the county isn't expecting to receive the school's final budgetary needs until mid-May.

Some of the schools fiscal needs should become apparent next week when the commissioners and the school board meet for a day-long budget retreat.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
William Lee Smith
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News Argus
May 19, 2004

County manager gets four-year contract

Author/Byline: Matt Shaw

The Wayne County commissioners agreed Tuesday on a contract for County Manager Lee **Smith**, his first since taking the job two years ago. The four-year deal does not change **Smith's** salary, currently \$92,000, or his benefits, although it does call for **Smith** to receive any cost-of-living increase given other county employees.

The contract's main benefit for **Smith** is that it protects him against an arbitrary decision by the commissioners to fire him. **Smith** would be due six months of severance pay and compensation for lost benefits if he's dismissed without good cause. **Smith** called the contract a vote of confidence.

Traditionally, managers have worked at the pleasure of the board, **Smith** said today. They could be fired "for any reason or even for no reason." In the last decade or so, more managers have sought contracts as a way to protect themselves and their families. About half the county managers in the state have contracts, **Smith** estimated.

Smith is the first Wayne County manager to have a contract. He also had one in Washington County, where he worked until taking the job here in late 2001.

Commissioners said they wanted to give **Smith** stability, especially with the chance that some commissioners will not be re-elected this fall. At least one new face is guaranteed in District 5, while three other incumbents face challengers.

Commissioner John Bell said that he'd like to give **Smith** a 10-year deal and then later joked, "We could do like they do in some Third World countries and make him manager for life." "Whether he wants to or not," **Smith** responded with a laugh.

The new deal, which runs through May 2008, says that **Smith's** salary will be set as part of the budget process. He will receive at least any cost of living pay increase given employees, but commissioners could decide to raise his pay more.

The manager also receives all county benefits, \$8,400 for travel, medical and dental insurance for both him and his family, and a 3 percent contribution to his 401(k) retirement plan.

Compiled By: Shannon Farr
 Colin Baenziger and Associates

Public Records Exemptions

Enclosed please find a copy of the response documents for your public records request. The following information is provided to explain the process employed to review and produce the response documents.

Reason	Description	Pages
Pll City Attorney - F.S. 119.071(4)(d)2.w.	The home addresses, telephone numbers, dates of birth, and photographs of current county attorneys, assistant county attorneys, deputy county attorneys, city attorneys, assistant city attorneys, and deputy city attorneys; the names, home addresses, telephone numbers, photographs, dates of birth, and places of employment of the spouses and children of current county attorneys, assistant county attorneys, deputy county attorneys, city attorneys, assistant city attorneys, and deputy city attorneys; and the names and locations of schools and day care facilities attended by the children of current county attorneys, assistant county attorneys, deputy county attorneys, city attorneys, assistant city attorneys, and deputy city attorneys are exempt from s. 119.07(1) and s. 24(a), Art. I of the State Constitution. This exemption does not apply to a county attorney, assistant county attorney, deputy county attorney, city attorney, assistant city attorney, or deputy city attorney who qualifies as a candidate for election to public office. This sub-subparagraph is subject to the Open Government Sunset Review Act in accordance with s. 119.15 and shall stand repealed on October 2, 2029, unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the Legislature.	36