

NEW RIVER VALLEY REGIONAL JAIL AUTHORITY
November 12, 2021
Held at the New River Valley Regional Jail

A. CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting of the New River Valley Regional Jail Authority was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Vice Chairman Richard Chidester.

Prior to roll call, he read a note from Grayson County indicating that Chief Deputy Gary Hash is replacing David Ashby as Sheriff Vaughan's alternate on the Authority board. Sheriff Vaughan said Ch. Deputy Hash has worked in dispatch, jail, patrol and investigations so he will be an asset for the board.

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Bland County:	Sheriff Ramsey; Mr. Workman
	Carroll County:	Mr. Lyons
	Floyd County:	Sheriff Craig
	Giles County:	Mr. Chidester
	Grayson County:	Sheriff Vaughan
	Wythe County:	Sheriff Foster; Mr. Vaught

ALTERNATES PRESENT:	Grayson County:	Mr. Smith; Ch. Deputy Hash
	Pulaski County:	Mr. Sweet (came in after roll call)

STAFF & GUESTS PRESENT:	Superintendent Gregory Winston
	Deputy Superintendent John Bowman
	Mrs. Tonya Akers-NRVRJ

B. ROLL CALL:

Mrs. Akers called roll and reported a quorum with eight (8) members and two (2) alternates present.

C. APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 2021 MINUTES:

Copies of the Minutes from the September 12, 2021 meeting were mailed to each member. Vice Chairman Chidester asked if there were any additions or additional corrections to the Minutes as presented.

Motion: Sheriff Vaughan moved that the September 12, 2021 Minutes be approved as presented. Mr. Workman seconded the motion.

Action: The motion passed unanimously.

D. OLD BUSINESS:

E. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Finance Committee:

Copies of the monthly financials were distributed and Mr. Workman reviewed them with the group.

Motion: Mr. Workman made a motion from the Finance Committee to approve the Financial Reports as presented.

Action: Following a roll call vote, the motion passed unanimously.

F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT:

Superintendent Winston began the meeting by recognizing the recent passing of former Bland County Sheriff Tom Roseberry, Officer Charlie Catron of Carroll County and Carla Anderson of the Carroll County Circuit Court Clerk's Office. Our sympathies are extended to their families, friends and co-workers.

Officer of the Quarter & Employee of the Quarter:

Officer Chrissy Combs was selected as Officer of the Quarter and Stephanie Carter of the NRVJR Records department was awarded Employee of the Quarter. Both of these ladies are very deserving of these awards. They will each have a designated parking spot for three months, have their photo posted in the lobby and were each given a gift card donated by one of our vendors.

Academy:

Eight officers graduated from the academy on November 4th. We are very happy to have them back on their respective shifts.

Operations:

The headcount today: 769. We're still trending fairly low and our average daily population runs around 689. We made around \$30,000 on contracted prisoners from Martinsville and Henry County. We're not going to bring in any additional US Marshal inmates and are only going to bring a certain number of contracted inmates due to short staffing issues. The vacancy savings we're receiving from the comp board is offsetting our ADP being down but we're seriously shortly staffed so we have to be mindful of our prisoner numbers.

Prisoner Issues:

We still have one prisoner that receives radiation/chemo twice per week. Superintendent Winston is working with the Commonwealth's Attorney to get him sentenced so he can move on to DOC. We also had a female inmate attempt suicide and was sent to Pulaski hospital for four days before being transferred to Richmond. During her stay, we had to send four certified

officers a day living in Richmond to supervise this prisoner for fifteen days. While she was in Richmond, we also had inmates in the hospitals in Pulaski and Roanoke.

We had a pretty big run of Covid resulting in fifteen staff members being out with three of them being hospitalized.

Personnel:

In the last two months we've hired seven officers, two LPN's and a mail room clerk. He also hired a civilian employee Joseph Shaver to run our Court Services Unit. We're running three court rooms now so he is in charge of connecting with the courts and making sure that runs smoothly. Over that same period of time, we lost three officers, two nurses and had two retirements.

Superintendent Winston said he and Sheriff Vaughan have spoken a couple times over the past few weeks regarding what the compensation board and general legislature is doing to change the compensation plan for regional jail officer and deputy sheriffs. We're hopeful there may be some movement from the comp board and possibly a budget amendment from the outgoing Governor that could include some compensation increases. That would definitely help with recruiting and retaining some qualified people.

Jail Cost Report:

Superintendent Winston reviewed the recent jail cost report with the board. Of all jails in the Commonwealth of Virginia we have the 2nd lowest operating cost at \$62.99 per day. We're down 6% in operating cost over the past three years and we are the lowest operating cost jail in the western region.

Covid Mandate:

We are working through the Covid vaccine mandate. We know that has been placed on hold by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals and we're waiting on some guidance from the Dept of Labor and Industry.

Promotion:

Interviews were conducted to replace Major Marty Stallard's position as the Director of Services due to his retirement. Superintendents from Northern Neck Regional Jail, Western Tidewater Regional Jail and Blue Ridge Regional Jail along with our Director of Security interviewed the candidates. We plan to make the selection announcement next Wednesday, Nov. 17th.

Security System Upgrade:

The contract to upgrade our security system has been received and sent to our attorney. He has noted some revisions and we're just waiting to the final document to come in reflecting those revisions. We probably need to move on that pretty quickly and it will run approximately \$800,000. We've budgeted for this project in our capital repair and replacement fund so it's not going to impact our operating fund.

Update on Energy Savings:

The energy savings performance contracting project is just about finished and we've made our first payment on that. We've had a number of months of savings on electricity and domestic cold water already. Hopefully we'll have more information available by the next meeting.

Inmate Workforce:

About a month ago, we identified a group of prisoners dedicated to go out the jurisdictions as needed. They were moved to one pod and unfortunately about ½ of them contracted Covid. After their 14-day quarantine many of them have now released.

Academy:

The academy wants to increase our cost of training by \$10 per officer from \$475 to \$485. We're hoping to work with them to get more correctional classes that are geared towards our staff. As President of the VARJ, the Superintendent wrote a letter to the Governor's office discussing budget requests for regional jails across the Commonwealth. This year, there is some language in there where regional academies are looking for an increase in allotment of funds from the Commonwealth. So, they went in support of that on behalf of the regional jail association in hopes that if more funding comes to the local regional academies that some of that will go towards correctional training.

Staffing:

Sheriff Vaughan said that everyone is having problems finding qualified staff and he understands we're critically low. He asked how many openings we have here? Superintendent Winston said we have 70 comp board openings. Sheriff Vaughan asked what our contingency plan was for the weekends? Superintendent Winston said it was more problematic on the weekends because we don't have the daylight support staff to come in to backfill so we call everyone on the roster. He authorized them to utilize any amount of overtime necessary and if they work their regular shift and 12 hours of overtime then they're paid a \$100 bounty. In terms of contingencies, we schedule enough people to work at any given time there is 21-22 people on the schedule. But if we have 2-3 people in the hospital then that's 6 certified officers gone plus then we have call ins. Sheriff Vaughan asked if that was critical and the Superintendent said yes it's absolutely critical and that's the biggest reason he keeps the inmate population as low as he does. Superintendent Winston spoke of a colleague at the Rappahannock Regional jail that he has 100 vacancies and he keeps his jail locked down. When we get low in terms of contingency wise, we lock inmates down and rotate them out. We can't keep them locked down all the time because that's as dangerous as being short staffed.

Pulaski County:

Mr. Sweet said everyone is experiencing this and described the new employee recruitment campaign that Pulaski County is doing. This began on November 1st and by November 3rd it had driven looks of jobs on their website up by 400% in three days. Their tourism and HR department coupled that with a referral bonus for all of the employees to become engaged. He suspects it will be a very positive boost to workplace moral and seems to be working. It's making a difference for Pulaski County.

Superintendent Winston said we've been doing an employee referral bonus and explained the steps for it. But he's at his wits end for getting more people in here. He doesn't think it's just the money and this is very tough work. He described several layers of problems that we're facing with employees being burned out and frustrated. He said he wasn't making excuses that the buck stopped with him to come up with ways to engage the employees and to get employees/supervisors to care.

Discussion:

Sheriff Vaughan asked if we were still doing exit interviews and what they were hearing. He said yes, HR does those and there were no particular trends in what we're seeing.

Mr. Vaught referred back to when the Superintendent said we have 70 comp board openings and asked if there were more that weren't considered comp board. Supt. Winston said those are vacant positions but, in many cases, we've hired people to fill them with civilian control room operators that can't go on a comp board position because they don't make enough money. So those positions are in fact filled. He's hired records clerks to work in Booking so that we don't have officers booking inmates in. There are some vacancies that are comp board vacancies but they are filled by other positions that we can't put in comp board positions because we've not paid them enough money. That number reflects the fact of that's our normal operating. He spoke with Mike Jackson at the National Institute of Corrections and wants them to come to do a staffing analysis however they aren't allowed any travel at this time. He'd like to see that if we only have 800 inmates do we need 70 more correctional officers because those numbers are based on us having 1000 inmates in the jail. When the building was designed there are two different operating styles—direct supervision and pods of observation which reflect two different styles of staffing.

Superintendent Winston gave examples of some similar issues that his colleagues are experiencing and things he's hearing. This past two months has been better in terms of retention and he feels that as we get people trained that we're beginning to turn the corner in getting them engaged and getting them to think positively about the job. At the end of the day, it's his responsibility to make sure we're finding ways to keep the staff engaged and get them in here and he's not doing a very good job of it. He said it was very frustrating and demoralizing for him too. Nothing breaks his heart anymore then to see people leave and they didn't say anything that someone could have fixed. He feels he's incredibly flexible with their needs: scheduling, staffing, bringing people in at a civilian position to assist the staff to do the day-to-day type stuff. We'll continue to do that and be as innovative as possible. We're in a position that we still have to hold them accountable but we're very reasonable and flexible. We'll continue to work on it.

Superintendent Winston said that we want to do things to empower the staff to be successful but we have a lot of untrained, inexperienced staff and a lot of new supervision which can create a very difficult work environment. Plus, the fact that it's so easy for them to go somewhere else.

Mr. Vaught said that the topic of an exit interview had come up earlier but by the time you hold one of those it's too late. As far as retention, has there been any thought of doing a climate survey or an employee survey to get the ones that are here to see what they like, don't like, what's right, what's wrong that you can address and work on. He thinks we need to be proactive. We can do all the exit interviews we want to but by the time they hit that door it's too late. He'd rather spend the time and resources doing a survey of current employees to make sure they remain employees.

Superintendent Winston said he has an HR person whose sole responsibility is employee engagement and she keeps her eye on that. The area we've identified is onboarding. He has a training person who has multiple certifications and spends the majority of her time at the academy plus doing transports/doctors' appointments. What he needs from that particular position and the Professional Standards Unit is that once an employee comes in, they have a mentor to be with them from the time they fill out the application until they graduate the academy. But due to staffing, how do you allocate positions to do that when they're being pulled to do other things in the jail. Mr. Sweet gave some ideas that Pulaski Co was doing in their onboarding such as gift cards to

local restaurants, etc and he encouraged the Superintendent to do what we need to do to fill in the gaps.

Superintendent Winston said he appreciated the encouragement and he takes it personally that we're not doing better. It's his responsibility and he feels like he's letting the employees and the board down. He tries to maintain a very high bar in keeping up with trends not just here but across the state and the country. There are some things that we can do, some things that need to change and some improvements can be made. With the support of the board certainly he'd like to do some of those things. Going back to the question of do we have a contingency, we need to create some sort of an on-call process so that when we have 3-4 people in the hospital and receive several call ins that we have people on the hook to come in. It is a difficult decision to make but inaction isn't going to help. He's been very cautious about mandatory overtime or on-call in an effort not to lose more people. He said he wished he was doing a better job of getting people in here and keeping them in here.

Sheriff Ramsey asked what was the minimum number of officers that the jail had to have to run security. Superintendent Winston answered 12-13 total which would include supervisors working duty posts and that would be with the inmates locked down. It was asked how many staff members we averaged on the weekends. Superintendent Winston said staff-wise 17 plus supervisors. That's what the schedule says and that's with no call ins and nobody in the hospital. Sheriff Ramsey said a former employee came to him stating that on his last day he was in charge of almost 300 inmates by himself. He said the former employee directed this to him because of him being on the board and said if something happened the Sheriff would be involved in a lawsuit. The former employee added if board could do something that they needed to because it's getting dangerous. Superintendent Winston said he shared that concern but he didn't know of a housing unit that would have 300 prisoners in it. He supposes anything was possible but he certainly isn't aware of anything like that that's ever happened.

Sheriff Craig had several questions about personnel and operational issues which were responded to by the Superintendent.

Update:

Mr. Sweet gave a lengthy update on the possible security breach at the Pulaski County Middle School. He wanted to brief the Authority due to the NRVRJ inmate workers being on the property during the time that the sensitive information was exposed. Superintendent Winston said there was no evidence on our part or any reason to believe that our inmates took or collected any information.

Vote on Security System Upgrade:

Vice Chairman Chidester asked if there was a motion from the floor to approve the security system update contract subject to approval by legal counsel.

Motion: Sheriff Vaughan made the motion to approve the security system update contract subject to approval by legal counsel.
Mr. Lyons seconded the motion.

Action: The motion passed with a vote of 10 yes and 1 abstention

G. NEW BUSINESS:

H. CITIZEN'S COMMENTS:

I. OTHER BUSINESS OR INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Sherriff Craig asked what was drawing our employees to Montgomery County versus here. Superintendent Winston said it was a fewer number of prisoners. They are serviced by a regional jail so all of their problem inmates go to Western VA Regional Jail. It's basically like running a trusty pod plus they pay a lot more money. There was discussion on the pay difference with our starting pay being \$35,149 and Montgomery County starts at \$42,000 but we do offer a better family insurance plan.

Sheriff Craig added that Floyd has been able to retain staff due to retention raises at 3, 5 and 10 years of service. He isn't sure how we could implement that here but it's something to work on.

J. ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business to discuss, Vice Chairman Chidester asked for motion to adjourn.

Motion: Mr. Workman made the motion to adjourn the meeting.
Mr. Sweet seconded the motion.

Action: The motion passed unanimously.

There being no further business to come before the Authority, Vice Chairman Chidester adjourned the meeting at 11:21 a.m.

Chairman Mark A. Armentrout