

**Bertie County Government**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Tall Glass of Water Project Update - Board votes to approve notice of intent for acquisition of 10.35 acres adjoining tract**

Windsor, NC---At the final meeting of the Bertie County Board of Commissioners for 2018, Commissioner Ernestine Bazemore encouraged her fellow Commissioners to advance the governing body's priorities---specifically citing the completion of EMS Station One, finishing the Blue Jay Recreation Center and opening the public access for the Tall Glass of Water Project in the coming months.

Securing the next piece of the jigsaw puzzle.....

On January 7, 2019 the Bertie County Board of Commissioners came out of Closed Session discussion with County Attorney Lloyd Smith, and voted unanimously to secure the adjoining "beach path" property for the Tall Glass of Water project based on a real estate appraisal report dated October 3, 2018. The "Resolution Authorizing Exercise of the Power of Eminent Domain" describes the 10.35 acre tract as integral for establishing public access to the recreational waters of the Albemarle Sound, which is a major priority for the County and in the public interest of the citizens of Bertie County.

"The Board's decision to acquire the adjoining 10.35 acre tract on the Albemarle Sound is critically important for eliminating the restrictive easement requirements, and is a necessary step in order to capitalize on the County's investment," noted Chairman John Trent. "With each step, the Board is changing the future for Bertie County and creating new opportunities for our children and families in the years to come," continued Trent.

Board Chairman John Trent made the motion to adopt the resolution which provides a legal description for the property, outlines procedures for giving notice to the current property owners, of the County's intent to use its authority for eminent domain, and declares "just compensation and fair market value" of \$120,000. Commissioner Ronald Wesson offered a second for the motion and the vote was unanimous, directing the County Attorney to prepare all necessary documents to complete the acquisition. The resolution specifies that the notice be sent no later than January 15th 2019 by certified mail, and if a negotiated sale cannot be completed by February 28th, court papers will be filed on March 1, as a first step toward securing the property.

The Board of Commissioners budgeted \$250,000 in the current fiscal year (July 1, 2018—June 30, 2019) for the Tall Glass of Water project to provide improved public accessibility to the waterfront recreation area. The funds will cover the costs for acquiring the adjoining 10.35 acre tract, plus the first phase of accessibility improvements.

The County Attorney initially attempted to negotiate for the purchase of this property in mid-2016, without success. At the same time, the Board of Commissioners was seeking grant funding through the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management to cover the costs of land acquisition and improving the beach path access. The 10.35 acre tract contains freshwater forested wetlands and the estimated cleared area is fifty-six percent (56%). The tract has approximately 140 feet of waterfront and is accessible by a recorded sixty foot easement from Bal-Gra Road. Development of the proposed draft site plan improvements is very challenging under the existing deed restrictions, two sets of restrictions recorded in 1998 and 2015, and are deemed to be in conflict with one another. After extensive legal review, the County Attorney has determined that resolving the deed restriction issue can be most efficiently achieved through acquiring the adjoining 10.35 acres, known as the Bell Heirs Tract.

Beginning in early 2013, the Board of Commissioners identified four strategic business clusters: Agribusiness, Bio-mass and energy, Adventure Tourism and Waterfront development as areas of focus

for the County's economic development efforts. As initially envisioned, Bertie County's "adventure tourism" efforts would capitalize on natural and wildlife resources for activities such as hunting, fishing, bird watching and eco-tourism activities such as hiking and canoeing.

"Providing public access to the County's eastern boundary waters of the Chowan River and Albemarle Sound has been one of our top priorities for several years," remarked Ronald Wesson, Chairman of the Board at the time of the decision to purchase the 137 acres in November 2015. Developing paddle trails and access to natural resources is a growing trend in Bertie County as evidenced by the Town of Windsor's construction of multiple waterway access sites, and constructing treehouses for camping along the Cashie River.

On November 16, 2015 the Bertie County Board of Commissioners took action to acquire 137 acres of land on the Albemarle Sound. By unanimous vote, the Commissioners secured public water access for recreation for the benefit of County residents and visitors. In addition to recreation and tourism, the "Tall Glass of Water" project is envisioned as an educational venue for the natural sciences and historical exploration along the site's 2,200 linear feet of coastal waters on the "inner banks" of North Carolina.

"The possibilities are unlimited" said then Chairman Ron Wesson in 2015, referring to swimming for children, adventure programming through the Cooperative Extension Service's 4-H clubs, family reunions, and church events including river baptisms in the shallow sandy waters on the shoreline. "Educational field trips for school children, a vacation spot for local families and hosting visitors from across the State and region are also possible with this investment, which will serve many generations into the future," said Wesson at the time.

In August of 2016, Bertie County secured a \$500,000 grant from the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. Chairman John Trent commented, "This is a home run for Bertie County citizens" and Trent further explained that the Board successfully negotiated a price reduction of \$250,000 just before closing on the real estate transaction, reducing the price to \$1,000,000 for the 137-acre tract. "This grant provides another \$500,000 offset, saving the taxpayers a total of \$750,000 on what began as a \$1.25 million purchase." As this project unfolds, Bertie County's out-of-pocket cost for land acquisition calculates to a net price of \$3,650 per acre, with nearly a half mile of public beach front access for our citizens, noted Trent.

Bertie County also provided a letter of support for the NC Coast Land Trust's successful grant application of \$1.2 million from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, as part of the land acquisition effort for the Salmon Creek recreation area. At a celebration in the Governor's mansion in March 2018, then Board Chair Ernestine Bazemore highlighted Bertie County's support for the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund and its effort to conserve natural resources along the inner banks of the Albemarle Sound and Salmon Creek. Its contribution to the NC Coastal Land Trust provided the foundation of financial support to create the Salmon Creek recreation area and future State Park

NCCLT's Executive Director Camilla Herlevich thanked Board Chair Bazemore for her "eloquent remarks about Bertie County, Site X, and the County's Tall Glass of Water project," and she praised Bertie County for its vision, investment of public funds, and efforts to conserve these historic natural areas resulting in the State's acceptance of the donated land---nearly 1,000 acres---as part of the State's Salmon Creek Recreation area located at the confluence of the Albemarle Sound and Salmon Creek.

The local synergy for this vision and the leadership of the Bertie County Board of Commissioners continues to be embraced in this region.

East Carolina University's Dr. Stan Riggs refers to this unique geographic location as the "Bertie Water Crescent," and with the support of the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) and the NC General Assembly, the strategic vision of the Bertie County Board of Commissioners is beginning to take shape and move in a forward direction.

According to Commissioner Tammy Lee, "eco-tourism is one of Bertie County's highest priorities." She noted that the Town of Windsor has been a longtime supporter of the Partnership for the Sounds, and the development of the Roanoke Cashie River Center adjacent to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife visitor's center

in Windsor. Additionally, the Town of Windsor has developed paddle trails, public access boat ramps and four tree houses for camping on the Cashie River. The River Center has also hosted several presentations by the First Colony Foundation's archeological team to share reports of its preliminary findings at "Site X" along the Salmon Creek.

During the public hearing for the grant application for the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund in April of 2016, County Manager Scott Sauer reminded the Board of the public enthusiasm generated when the Commissioners announced their decision to purchase the initial 137 acres of land on the Albemarle Sound. Sauer also spoke of this historic step to break down barriers by providing public access to these recreational waters, noting that the Board's efforts are creating a legacy for future generations and building a better future for our children and grandchildren. Specifically, Sauer acknowledged the existence of barriers for persons of limited resources, and for people of color to access public waters for recreation in this County.

The Bertie County Board of Education has also embraced the field teaching and hands-on learning opportunities for local students at the County's property, and there have been discussions regarding expanding the "Sound to the Sea" curriculum activities here in Bertie County.

The Board of Commissioners has also discussed the possibility of leasing NCDOT a portion of the TGOW 137-acre site for a Welcome Center and Rest Area location in Bertie County along the Interstate 87 corridor, which is in the final planning stage.

"This was a team effort with the Board of Commissioners fully engaged from the outset" and the Board set high expectations, and everyone performed in an exceptional manner said Chairman Ron Wesson in November of 2015, giving special thanks to the County's legal team Lloyd Smith and Jonathan Huddleston, Finance Officer William Roberson, Planning Director Traci White and project leadership from Economic Developer Steve Biggs.



Ernestine Bazemore and John Trent, respectively the past and current chairs of the Bertie County Board of Commissioners, are shown working out the details of purchasing additional land for the "Tall Glass of Water" project.

Photo by Gene Motley Roanoke-Chowan News-Herald