



Wake County

301 South McDowell Street
Raleigh, NC

Meeting Minutes Board of Commissioners

Monday, October 14, 2024

2:00 PM

Wake County Justice Center

Work Session

Meeting Called to Order: Vice-Chair Susan Evans

Vice Chair Susan Evans called meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

She acknowledged that Chair Shinica Thomas and Commissioner Vickie Adamson have an excused absence from today's Work Session.

Commissioners Present: Vice-Chair Susan Evans, Commissioner Matt Calabria, Commissioner Don Mial, Commissioner Cheryl Stallings and Commissioner Tara Waters.

Excused: Chair Shinica Thomas and Commissioner Vickie Adamson.

Staff Present: David Ellis, County Manager; Emily Lucas, Deputy County Manager; Duane Holder, Deputy County Manager; Ashley Jacobs, Deputy County Manager; Tiffany Campbell, Senior Assistant County Attorney; Ben Canada, Chief of Staff; Yvonne Gilyard, Clerk to the Board; Toni Womack, Deputy Clerk to the Board; Jason Horton, Strategic Initiatives Director; Denise Foreman, Assistant County Manager; Michael James, Assistant County Manager; Dara Demi, Chief Communications Officer; Stephanie Mintz, Communications Consultant; Portia Johnson, Senior Executive Assistant; Tanika Cooper, Senior Executive Assistant; Lindsey Davis, Senior Budget & Management Analyst; Jonathan Glenn, Juvenile Crime Prevention Program Manager; Jonathan Feldman, Chief Information Officer; Michelle Venditto, Director of Budget & Management Services and Aaron Brown, Budget & Management Services Manager.

Others Present: Willie Rowe, Wake County Sheriff; Gary Carr, Director of Finance, SmartStart; Carol Orji, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, Smart Start; Dr. Robert Taylor, Superintendent, Wake County Public School System; Siarra Scott, Deputy Director of N.C. Office of Violence Prevention; Lorrin Freeman, Wake County District Attorney; Scott Oosterhoudt, Wake County District Attorney's Office; Amanda Rolle, City of Raleigh Chief of Staff; Hannah Schuette, City of Raleigh; Dr. Clint

Robinson, Chief of Staff and Strategic Planning, Wake County Public School System; Rosalia Fodera, Public Information Officer, Sheriff's Department; Scott Parker, Major Deputy Sheriff; Octavia Rainey, Wake County resident and Baron James, CBS News.

1. Agenda

Attachments: [10.14.2024 Work Session Agenda.docx](#)

Vice-Chair Evans shared today's agenda:

*Safe Wake

*Smart Start Update

2. Safe Wake

Attachments: [SafeWakeOct14.pdf](#)

[Safe Wake Charter DRAFT.pdf](#)

Ms. Ashley Jacobs, Deputy County Manager introduced the Safe Wake Program.

She shared Context and Background regarding the Safe Wake Charter. She shared that request came from Commissioner Calabria asking staff to research this initiative. Over the past two years, staff have conducted extensive research, environmental scans and held numerous meetings with stakeholders (i.e. Sheriff's Department, Department of Justice, County Attorney's office and District Attorney's office) across the county.

She shared additional context and background:

-March 2023, Commissioners expressed interest in the program addressing all forms of violence (not just gun violence).

-Conversations evolved into a public health approach; similar to the public health approach done in Charlotte, Mecklenburg and Guilford Counties.

-Charter is a result of discussions with community stakeholders

-Charter established dedicated staff

-Charter creates an advisory board

-Charter defines roles and responsibilities of each entity partnering in the program

She shared Purpose and Vision:

-Purpose: reduce (or prevent) violence in Wake County

-Vision: strategy for reducing violence through prevention, intervention and community engagement. She shared Safe Wake will supplement existing law enforcement efforts and will not direct nor interfere with public safety efforts.

She shared Public Health Approach to Violence:

-Is a scientific, data-driven framework

-Aims to prevent violence before it starts

She shared steps of a Public Health Approach:

- Define the problem
- Identify the risks factors
- Develop, evaluate and refine prevention and intervention strategies = engaging community members is key
- Ensure widespread adoption to determine effectiveness of programs

She shared Three Levels of Prevention:

- Primary Level = prevention of violence before it occurs
- Secondary Level = immediate response after violence has occurred (emergency care or medical care)
- Tertiary Level = focuses on long-term responses after violence has occurred to address consequences of violence.

She shared Safe Wake Plan:

- Work with community leaders to prioritize form of violence to be addressed
- Establish a local office of violence prevention
- Develop a multi-faceted plan in Wake County and provide infrastructure for implementation

She shared Governance:

- Safe Wake will have one or more dedicated staff located in County Manager's office
- Direct oversight will be provided by County Manager's Office
- Efforts will be coordinated with Safe Wake Advisory Board

She shared Advisory Board Composition:

- Noting that the City of Raleigh is requesting two representatives to serve on behalf of the City of Raleigh.

She shared County Manager Responsibilities:

- Hire and supervise
- Consult with advisory board
- Provide and monitor the accountabilities

She shared Chair Roles/Responsibilities:

- Co-develop meeting scope
- Oversee committee member selection process
- Review work products of the committee

She shared Advisory Board Responsibilities:

- Will seek collaborations and partnerships
- Organize events to promote Safe Wake and awareness

- Develop performance measures and key performance indicator (KPI's)
- Prepare annual report on progress

She shared Data Collection and Analysis:

- The data is not readily available and no single location for where data is collected
- Data needs to be uniform
- Recommending Data sharing agreement between county and each municipality

She shared Next Steps:

Direction from the Board

Commissioner Calabria shared appreciation for staff for working on project. He shared, this project was first discussed in May 2022. He shared this project involved two and 1/2 years of staff's assistance. He shared US Attorney's Office and City of Raleigh have been involved from beginning to end. He shared assistance has been given by Chair Thomas as Chair of the Board and Commissioner Mial, for Chair of the Safety Committee. He shared there are various stakeholders. Each sharing their own experiences to understand what this work should be and not be. He shared final product has come a long way. He shared charter attempts to strike right level of specificity. To build a team of experts to guide work as well as best practices and plan. He shared Mr. Danya Perry, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director and his team have been working on building a skeletal plan to determine best fit for Wake County. He shared the goal of the project is to be broad enough to provide guidance and the shell is a product of what work will involve. He shared the role of municipalities will be to anticipate within the Safe Wake effort, there will be sections operating in connection (data, community stakeholders and non-profits, municipal representatives). He shared the role of municipalities will be robust. He shared there needs to be a common understanding that Safe Wake is not intended to replace law enforcement and this is a partnership. He shared Safe Wake will not supplant the work being done by law enforcement and community good by non-profits. He shared this can be a best practice nation wide. He shared death numbers are decreasing in double digits and this will be an opportunity to be a leader.

Commissioner Mial shared appreciation to Wake County staff for dedication and hard work on this project. He shared doing this work for a year and half, the goal is to get a solid document. He shared as someone who has spent his career in public safety, this plan is vital to the community and he is supportive of this agenda item. He shared work will take collaboration of entire community to get this done. He is looking forward to collaboration to come to solutions to provide a safe community. He restated this project will not take over of Sheriff's office or law enforcement,

but just to assist with providing a safe community.

Commissioner Waters shared appreciation of staff for everyone's hard work. She shared excitement to see work done by the partners in the room. She asked regarding make-up of advisory board and asked if a youth voice member could be given for consideration. Such as a student body president from one of the schools or someone with lived experience and she solutes all that has gone forward.

Deputy Manager Holder shared the youth health council would be a helpful resource and will convey that information.

Vice-Chair Evans asked if the City of Raleigh would like to have representative/designee from the Police force in addition to the Raleigh City Manager to serve on the advisory board.

Ms. Jacobs confirmed that is correct. The City of Raleigh wants to have the Police Chief and City Manager to serve on the advisory board.

Commissioner Stallings thanked staff and Commissioner Calabria for the vision and fully supports this item. She shared many persons in community show support as work is very much needed. She shared Social determinants of health and how to move towards safe and healthy communities. She thinks someone with lived experience or resident or youth on the advisory board would be helpful.

Vice-Chair Evans shared initially Safe Wake was centered around intervention and she likes the broadened approach for where it is now. She has not been privy to brainstorming conversations and asked if examples from other communities could be shared in terms of what data has been worked on.

Commissioner Calabria shared that was one focus area when speaking with federal representatives. Asking what is effective and heard about identifying persons who are likely to engage in violence based on history, family member is a victim of gun violence and provides ability to zero in for positive interactions. He shared targeted focus is important and being connected to the community is important. He shared recommendations have been made about the importance of the Safe Wake Director reporting to County Manager's office; majority of recommendations focused on data and identifying solutions involves looking at data and matching things up.

Commissioner Mial shared it was discovered data was not the same across the board. Trying to exchange data and looking at data from twelve municipalities and Sheriff's office and risk factors hoping to prevent violence. He shared goal is to prevent return offenders. He shared to

house juveniles in facilities, it costs about \$100,000 per year/per individual. He shared goal is to keep individuals out of the system and to place more funds in education.

Sheriff Rowe shared from a law enforcement standpoint, he fully endorses the Safe Wake plan and embraces the public health aspect. He shared District Attorney's office, WCPSS are tools in keeping community safe while identifying the what, when, where, how and why. Focus is to prevent crime and rehabilitate persons to become productive citizens can be a win-win for everyone. He shared law enforcement is 14 municipalities, Angier and Durham annexed into Wake County, and Raleigh has annexed into Durham County and Cary has annexed into Chatham County and must separate data to get accurate data.

Dr. Robert Taylor, WCPSS supports this initiative. He shared much of the data that is reportable offences, but WCPSS will be there as partner as schools are reflective of what happens in the community. He shared goal is to prevent youth from becoming part of catching system. He shared WCPSS stands ready to support and provide help to move initiative forward.

Ms. Lorrin Freeman, District Attorney, thanked Wake County for taking a vested interest in SafeWake. She shared public safety creates quality of life with a low crime rate per capita. She shared with growth in population, she sees changes in makeup of types of crimes faced on a daily basis. This model is different from many areas. She shared having tools to use is thankful.

Vice-Chair Evans asked about other municipalities and if statistics are showing that most violent crime is in Raleigh.

Commissioner Calabria shared the City of Raleigh has been engaged in these conversations and they were selected as one site for a federal government public safety partnership. The City of Raleigh is also doing a deep dive on their law enforcement to see what can be done differently. He shared a disproportionate amount of violent crime exists within the City of Raleigh.

Ms. Freeman shared homicides in Wake County vs Mecklenburg has twice the number of homicides. seeing decrease this year. She shared as county shifts and other areas grow, more violent crime comes outside city limits of Raleigh.

Vice-Chair Evans shared data may indicate otherwise. She shared her concern that this is a Wake County effort and not just focused on City of Raleigh.

Vice-Chair Evans asked to take this item to the next Board meeting to approve the formal charter and create a position in County Manager's office in the January/February time frame.

County Manager Ellis shared the City of Raleigh is bringing this item to their Work Session in November and will come back to the Board of Commissioners in January.

All Commissioners gave a thumbs up for adding Safe Wake Charter to next Board of Commissioners Regular meeting agenda.

3. Smart Start Update

Attachments: [Smart Start Update - October 2024.pdf](#)

Ms. Lindsey Davis, Senior Budget & Management Analyst will provide introduction. She shared representatives from Smart Start are here with a request to accept applications for pre-k students whose families are at or below state medium income.

She shared agenda:

- *Current State
- *Request
- *County Staff Recommendation
- *Discussion and Questions

Ms. Orji, Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, Smart Start shared Current State:

- For FY25, the current slots is 1,532
- The reimbursement rate of \$1,346

She shared as of October 8, 2024:

- 1,447 of the 1,532 slots are filled
- Slots to be filled until March 30, 2025

She shared Current State - How we got here:

- Goal set in October 2019 to serve 85% of income eligible 4-year old population
- To date, 85% remains the standard of serving families interested in Pre-k programs
- Income eligible of County funding defined as Wake County families that earn at or below 75% State Median Income.

She shared Income Eligibility Chart:

- Family size and gross income are key factors to determining eligibility

-Table numbers released October 19, 2023 to be effective Jan. 1, 2024

She shared request:

- Smart start request to expand eligibility for Pre-K slots to include families who are between 76%-85% of the State Median Income, if the child has at least one additional risk factor
- Risk factors may be individualized education plan, developmental disabilities, chronic health conditions or limited English proficiency
- Smart Start board of directors has defined greatest need as of 85% of state median income

She shared Request-Business Case:

- Admitting students up to 85% of the State Median Income is allowable
- Smart start is allowed to utilize up to 20% of its slots
- 4,400 applications were received from the 2024-2025 school year as of September 26th
- Smart Start has the capacity to serve additional children who meet the 85% median income
- 85 of the 1,532 total Pre-K slots are unfilled as of October 8, 2024 (80 private slots and 5 head start slots)
- All Wake County Public Schools slots are filled
- Sites are facing budget shortfalls. Unfilled slots reduce reimbursement rates revenue, leading to sites not being able to pay staff or stay open.

Mr. Gary Carr, Director of Finance, SmartStart thanked Commissioners for support of Pre-k program which has allowed program to maintain 1,532 slots. He shared deployed program is a blended funding model and for private slots, the top rate is \$1,386 and the State pays \$791 reimbursement. Balance comes from Smart Start allocations and Wake County Government. He shared State funds 63% of program and 18% comes from Smart Start and 19% from the County. He shared County funding is important to maintain private slots. He shared request will cover \$595.00 per slot (which is the difference of \$1,386-\$791).

He shared the difference between \$595 per slot would go towards funding.

Ms. Davis shared County staff recommendation:

- Approve request to expand eligibility to include families who are up to 85% of the State Median income
- Prioritize applications who are at or below 75% of the State Median income
- Maintain current funding formula and number of slots in FY25 based on the 75% median income threshold
- Seeking Board of Commissioners support of new process

Vice-Chair Evans asked for private sites, why were there 80 slots that were

not filled?

Ms. Orji shared it depends on the zip code for the applicant and normally Smart Start tries not to place families who are experiencing undue hardship or families that do not have transportation. She shared all slots are filled in Wake Field area and there is a wait list. In Cary or Apex, there are one or two slots open, but this means asking families to transport their children back and forth to these locations. This request will allow Smart Start to look at areas where there are opening and to be able to support the children and families to get into the program. She shared transportation costs again are a factor in placement and places an additional strain on the families and the children.

Commissioner Mial asked if there open slots in Wendell and Zebulon area.

Ms. Orji shared yes, as those sites asked for expansion and the number of children placed there increased; however, transportation still remains the biggest challenge. If families are not able to get to the site, they will decline the application.

Commissioner Mial asked about racial background/ethnicity.

Ms. Orji shared backgrounds are mixed. It depends on zip codes.

Vice-Chair Evans shared she has worked with Ms. Orji to connect with transit agencies to identify bus routes but sometimes bus routes were not an option. She also shared Raleigh and Go-Triangle are charging fares and this may impact families being able to qualify for fare-free access.

Commissioner Waters shared appreciation regarding additional risk factors as some families are just over income limits and having additional risk factors qualifiers is worth applauding.

Commissioner Calabria asked if all the Wake County slots are filled? He asked should anything be determined since WCPSS slots are in high demand versus other slots?

Ms. Orji shared she didn't think this would be necessary; restating that transportation is the biggest challenge. She shared some families would prefer to stay on wait list until slot becomes available instead of the challenges that come with no transportation.

Commissioner Calabria asked if there is a shortage for early child hood teachers and what can be done to encourage if shortage exists for centers.

Ms. Orji shared Smart Start is working with Wake Tech with their

apprenticeship program and full apprenticeship is with adults as Wake Tech provides incentives. She shared Smart Start partners with Bright Futures as well. She shared conversations are taking place around pulling resources together to see where loopholes exist.

Commissioner Calabria asked once change has been made, he would like to see how numbers have changed in terms of vacancy rates.

Vice-Chair Evans shared explanation as to why Wake County slots are filled and others are not. She shared for pre-k slots at public school system sites, there is an identified need beyond income.

Ms. Orji shared for students who applied before July 16, the students are required to go through a WCPSS screening process and the screening assigns numbers to each student. She shared there is an increase for children who scored high with academic needs and behavioral issues and those students will go to WCPSS. She shared there has been an up tick and this determines where the child goes.

Vice-Chair Evans shared this year, Smart Start does have enough sites that Wake County has funded. She shared this was not the case a few years back during the pandemic.

Vice-Chair Evans clarified the request of the Board today and that is to approve which students can be considered for slots but doing so will not change budget commitments for the year.

Ms. Davis confirmed that is correct and this is a way to ensure that all slots get filled. All commissioners gave approval of this recommendation.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Antoinette H. Womack, NCCCC
Deputy Clerk
Wake County Board of Commissioners