

State Budget Gives CC \$40 Million\$ more on Justice Center Project!!! Project likely to end up financially Bankrupting Cleveland County!!?? Report, commentary and conclusions by Robert A

True Bureaucracies always spend every dime of their yearly budgets and ask for more \$\$\$ for the next year. The Cleveland County Commissioners, the CCS School Board, The Health Department, and all other County agencies have taken it upon themselves to act as true bureaucracies that have apparently taken this bureaucratic principle over the limit to finally bankrupt Cleveland County by the end of 2024. This year's final state budget under Speaker of the House Tim Moore and the \$40 Million\$ more for the Justice Center Project will, ironically, bankrupt Cleveland County. It is almost certain that Tim Moore's legacy of bringing \$Million\$ in grants to Cleveland County will dry up and ultimately ruin Cleveland County financially for one simple reason. The Cleveland County Commissioners, School Board, etc., (Even the Cleveland County Fair) have forgotten all about fiscal responsibility and face cost over-runs on every project. When the State Grants finally go away when Tim Moore is no longer Speaker of the House, the county's matching fund requirements will finally kick in and ultimately turn into huge debts for taxpayers to pay for the rest of our lives. CC is then broke financially. Possibly beyond fixing without huge property tax bill increases.

The Cleveland County Commissioners (under Chairman Kevin Gordon) are the only County agency that can raise a tax, apparently have seen this coming and have delayed their very large Property Tax Value revaluation until 2025. Clearly, a planned scheme to get themselves re-elected in the 2024 Republican Primary Elections and have several years left in their term for the short-sighted voters to forget what Kevin Gordon has done to their wallets and checkbooks by their next election cycle in 2028.

Commissioner Chairman Kevin Gordon is already out campaigning for the 2024 Elections he is scared to death that he is going to lose. He has run his political ads on AM Radio Station WOHS and had an illegal/unethical political campaign "set-up" on CCS School-owned property (the Shelby High School Baseball Field) during the Eddie Holbrook connected American Legion World Series 2023 Games. It's a surprise that CCS School Board Chairman Robert Queen and his Waterboys Joel Shores, Rodney Fitch Ron Humphries, Greg Taylor were not also out there running their political spin. All preaching the virtues of transparency, but practicing the ugliness of censorship and censure. So far Robert Queen has limited his unethical political campaigning to following around behind CCS Superintendent Stephen Fisher like a puppy dog to school events and getting his picture taken at awards ceremonies. Queen, Gordon, et. al.; all want to get themselves re-elected, but know that the truth of the matter is working against them. Working against them HARD!!!

Back to the CC Justice Center Project.

The Cleveland County Justice Center Project was born in the Cleveland County Jail by unruly inmates who, in their abundance of spare time, came up with the idea of everybody

flushing the Jail's toilets at the same time. Just for the heck of it. Just to see what would happen.

What happened was that the sudden extra water flow from the toilets caused overflows that overwhelmed either the toilet drains, the toilet drain vents or the floor drains and floor drain vents. Either way, the extra water, outside the normal drain piping somehow worked its way down to the floor below that was occupied by the Clerk of Court's Office record files storage area. Tarps were used to cover the Clerk's files and somehow the jail inmates found out that they had pissed off some people somewhere, so they would continue their mischief on a regular basis.

And, just like this most recent fiasco at the Midpines Recycling Center, County officials went off half-cocked and, instead of installing water flow limiters in the Jail's toilet piping or fixtures, the idea came up like this, "why not just build a new jail?" Now the mule was out of the barn. Why not build a new Courthouse? While we are at it, why not build a New DA's Office too? Even though tons of cash were already just recently spent to refurbish a whole adjoining building for the DA's Office. The County had just purchased the perfectly suitable old Shelby Star building that the Sheriff's Office had eyes on for an expansion of their own. Everybody wanted something big and new and nobody on the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners had sense enough to realize that the average school in Cleveland County was much older than the Jail and Courthouse, but the School Board was refusing to provide a plan for new school construction for their own stupid reasons. Or no reason at all.

And, the County Manager wanted to build his resume to include major construction experience. So, all these wild and costly ideas were kept hush-hush. NOBODY wanted Robert A to know about all of this because they knew for certain that Robert A would blow the whistle to the public about this very costly project.

The County Manager, for his part, worked up a low-ball estimate of \$90 Million\$ for this Justice Center Project and hid it deep in the County's Budget documents. And though this item was the biggest expense in the new County Budget, the County Manager did not mention one word about this project in his presentation to the County Commissioners, although they, the Commissioners, already knew about it.

However, as luck would have it, Robert A was looking deep into that big thick County Budget package for something else and happened upon an entry for \$90 Million\$ that was hidden amongst all the minutia. Robert A immediately smelled a rat. **Robert A**, with all his engineering experience with major construction projects, immediately recognized that this \$90 Million\$ budget item was "low-balled" and after more review, by at least a factor of 2.5. That \$225 Million\$ was more in the ballpark. (Hold this thought for later.) When more information is acquired) Robert A knew he had enough information to sound the alarm to the taxpayers of Cleveland County. And did just that! Informed the taxpayers of Cleveland County to beware.

As the Justice Center Project planning secretly progressed, Speaker of the House Tim Moore secured \$59 Million\$ in funding for the original \$90 Million\$ (low-balled) estimate. Then, another \$6.5 Million\$. So, the \$90 Million\$ minus \$65.5 in state funding left, on paper, the CC Taxpayers on the hook for \$24.5 Million\$. Which was probably a do-able cost **IF** that \$90 Million\$ total price was a good number. And, the Commissioners began pushing the Justice Center Project as a replacement location for a New Jail and New Courthouse project for facilities "that had reached their useful life." Robert A received very little serious feedback from CC Taxpayers who might have also picked up in the big deception by the Justice Center supporters.

Then, as time passed and more details started to come out, the Commissioners the County Manager, and their foolish staff were

convinced that the New Justice Center must be built on the same location as the OLD Jail and the OLD Courthouse. So the Justice Center Project cost would have to include a demolition phase where the old buildings were demolished, additional site preparation costs where a location for a new Jail had to have demolition work to remove whatever existing structures were on that location, the site prep had to be completed before construction on a new Jail was even started. All of which caused major cost escalations over the same project, had the New Jail site been on a construction "site ready" piece of property to begin with. Then, when the New Jail was finished, the same process would have to occur in the new Courthouse and offices and such. Totally confusing and bad planning all around.

As it started to become apparent to all the secret participants that the budget for the Justice Center was totally useless, the Commissioners secretly decided to kick in another \$50 Million\$ to the original \$90 Million\$ that **Robert A** had discovered in the original Budget. For a total estimate of \$140 Million\$ and not one bit of basis for that estimate either. No Construction Contractors or Architects had anything to review to base an even halfway decent cost estimate.

Then, somebody somewhere discovered that new site drainage was required which would entail very large pipes buried very deeply on the site, before anything else could be done in the way of new construction. This major site preparation work was horridly started before anybody had a good handle on the spiraling costs that had started to accumulate rapidly. By the early months of 2023, close to the time that Cleveland County Manager Brian Epley suddenly resigned and left Cleveland County, the Commissioners were alerted to the fact that, for the most part, the project's funding on hand was gone. So, construction had to stop until new sources of funding were located.

But the Commissioners were caught. If they shut down

construction, Robert A and others would alert the public and the public would vote them out in the 2024 Elections. So, the Commissioners, under the incompetent leadership of Chairman Kevin Gordon reverted to their old bag of tricks. **DECEPTION!!!** They would shut construction way down but still maintain just a little bit of activity to deceive the public. And, this worked for months. Until Robert A went over to the Justice Center construction site, walked all the way around and watched carefully what was actually going on.

What Robert A observed was the gates into the construction site were open, but just a few vehicles were on the site. Of all the rental construction equipment on site only one large crane and two small, Bobcat size pieces of equipment were being operated. The crane was moving a large concrete "top" to an 8 to 10-ft diameter drain "riser" high in the air from the site storage area across to the location of the riser. Robert A immediately understood what was going on. First, heavy loads are moved as low as possible to minimize the "pendulum effect" of the suspended load. Moving a heavy load high in the air can "topple" a crane moving over unlevel terrain and is to be avoided. Moving a heavy load high in the air over uneven terrain has to be done very slowly. But moving a heavy and very visible load high in the air can be seen from all around. This was the illusion the commissioners wanted the public to see. A disguise for what was going on. Which was very little. The top of the riser was finally carried to its destination, where only ONE person on the ground grabbed the tagline attached to the riser "top" and guided it into its final position as the crane operator very slowly lowered the load into place.

As for the two "BobCat" (small) sized pieces of equipment that were moving around, Robert A watched their movement for a very long time trying to determine what they were being used for. AS these two pieces of small equipment traversed the construction site, not even one shovel full of dirt or

anything else was moved from one place to another. After a long while watching, **Robert A** determined that their only purpose was to stir up a small cloud of dust over the site to somehow convince the passing traffic that something related to construction was going on at the site. **Robert A** concluded that, at this rate of construction, it would take 100 years of site preparation to get the site ready for actual building construction to start.

However, in all construction projects, **time is money**. This deception by the Commissioners is costing taxpayers in Cleveland County lots of money for the Justice Center Project. So much money that the plans to remodel the old Shelby Rescue Squad building into a new location for the Board of Election have completely stopped and will NOT be available for the 2023 Elections. Even the fiasco at the Midpines Recycling Center was mostly caused by the Justice Center sucking away all available County funding.

Now, a new State Budget has been passed that includes \$40 Million\$ more for the Justice Center Project. Let's just look at the numbers for that project.

From way back toward the start of this article:

The Original Budget estimates for the Justice Center Project:

\$90 Million\$ then updated to \$140 Million\$

Total State Funding for the CC Justice Center Project

\$59 Million\$ + \$5.9 Million\$ and now + \$40 Millllion\$ = \$104.9 Million\$

Original required County funding was \$90 Million\$ – \$64.9 = **\$25.1 Million\$**

New required county funding is \$140 Million\$ – \$104.9 Million\$
= **\$35.1 Millions**

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CC Commissioner Chairman Kevin Gordon and his band of nitwits may even say that this new calculation is also doable. But the fact is this is just a number on paper put together by a bunch of bureaucrats. The truth of the matter, as relayed by sources, is that **over \$100 Million\$** has been spent already on the site preparation for the Justice Center Project and THAT is ONLY ABOUT 65% COMPLETE. And the actual building Construction has not even started. So, without significantly MORE State Funding over the years, this Justice Center Project cost escalation WILL INDEED financially bankrupt Cleveland County. And, without Tim Moore as Speaker of the House, and since the State has already put up more than \$100 Million\$, why should the State of North Carolina pay more for Cleveland County's stupidity?

Folks, you might say, "Well **Mr. Robert A Williams**, **YOU** are planning to run for the Cleveland County Board of Commissioners in 2024, what would YOU do to prevent Cleveland County from experiencing financial ruination over this Justice Center Project???"

To that question **Robert A** says, Folks, that is a good question! But, since this article is long enough already, Stay tuned for Part 2 of this article. For **Robert A** has a common sense approach to fixing this and other similar problems with Kevin Gordon and his band of nitwits' way of running Cleveland County into financial ruination. (Hint: It begins with real transparency and real citizen engagement and not the kind

presently used by this current band of CC Commissioners.)