

MINUTES

House Select Committee on Disaster Relief

November 13, 2017

The House Select Committee on Disaster Relief met on Monday, November 13, 2017 at 2 p.m. in Room 544 in the Legislative Office Building. Representative John Bell, Chair of the Committee, presided during the meeting. Committee Members present were Representatives Brenden Jones, Vice Chair, John Faircloth, Pat McElraft, Gregory Murphy MD, Garland Pierce, Donna White, and Shelly Willingham. Staff Members present were Susan Sitze, Kristen Harris, Howard Marsilio and Kory Goldsmith along with the Committee Clerk, Susan Horne. The Sergeant-at-Arms Assistants that provided assistance during the meeting were Bill Moore, David Linthicum, Bill Riley and Barry Moore.

The meeting convened at 2:06 p.m. After introductions and a brief overview of the Committee's direction by Representative Bell, staff member Susan Sitze read the charge of the Committee (see Attachment A). Representative Bell noted the Committee plans to review what has taken place and what the current needs are across North Carolina since the passage of the disaster relief packages in 2016 and 2017.

Representative Bell introduced Michael A. Sprayberry, the Director of Emergency Management in the Department of Public Safety. His report reviewed the chronology of the storms (Tropical Storms Hermine and Julia) that came through North Carolina with the end result being Hurricane Matthew in October, 2016. He noted that manpower along with the support of state agencies and private entities was a great success during the aftermath of Matthew. Mr. Sprayberry talked about the wildfires in Western North Carolina in October and November 2016. The Disaster Relief packages of 2016 (\$200,928,370-House Bill 2, 2016 Third Extra Session) and 2017 (\$100,000,000- Senate Bill 338, 2017 Session) provided financial assistance to many entities in various capacities across the State. He continued by discussing the funds that were distributed to the housing programs and assistance, local government infrastructure, economic stabilization, agriculture infrastructure, recovery planning, volunteer fire departments infrastructure, community colleges, emergency response and disaster relief (see Attachment B).


After the presentation, Representative Murphy asked how groups like the Baptist Men communicate their interest to assist. Mr. Sprayberry explained how plans are created with volunteers at quarterly meetings and monthly telephone calls with volunteers (Red Cross, Baptist Men, etc.). Representative Murphy asked how would the State address areas such as Princeville that have re-occurring risks for flooding as the sea level rises over time. Mr. Sprayberry replied that areas will need to relocate because FEMA and the State won't continue to fund an area over and over again. He noted that a comprehensive study of the rivers and streams would give the State a plan of action on how to mitigate areas that continually flood. Representative McElraft asked how many dollars has the federal government spent with Hurricane Matthew compared to

Hurricane Floyd. Mr. Sprayberry said he would have to get back with an answer. Representative McElraft asked if there is any use of the land once a buyout has occurred such as tree plantings, etc. Mr. Sprayberry commented that a greenspace in flooded areas would be a good idea. Representative Jones asked how can unused funds that are set aside for disaster relief be transferred from state agency to another agency (specifically \$235,000 in the Department of Commerce). Mr. Sprayberry replied there will have to be a way to unlock the funds so they can be transferred. Representative Jones asked about reallocating funds for the community colleges in his district. Mr. Sprayberry said he would check on this and respond. Ms. Mercy Benton from the Office of State Budget and Management stated \$2.7 million has been encumbered and \$347,000 of those dollars has been expended. Rep. Bell asked if OSBM could review the allocations for disaster relief and provide a list of unused funds to the General Assembly. Ms. Benton replied that under current law, OSBM doesn't have the authority to divert funds that have been allocated to a certain agency. With regard to the building increase of housing and roads, Representative Faircloth asked how does urban development affect the 100-year flood plain. Mr. Sprayberry replied the map of the 100-year flood plain is pretty accurate and is becoming more accurate because of better technology. Representative Faircloth mentioned to add highways (and superhighways) and commercial buildings to the question which Mr. Sprayberry said he would get more detailed information and provide the answer to him. With regards to mitigation with the Town of Princeville, Representative Willingham asked about the involvement of the citizens and town council in the process of making a selection, and are their wishes in compliance with the buyout of the State. Mr. Sprayberry explained the citizens have had input in the process and the town council has met numerous times but reiterated the State can't make decisions without the town's approval. Representative Willingham asked if the Division of Emergency Management has the authority to force the town to act. Mr. Sprayberry replied the Division doesn't have the authority to overrule municipal authority. Representative Willingham asked about the positions that were funded for mental health workers and counselors in the areas that were affected by the hurricane. Mr. Sprayberry responded that there was a grant provided to the Division of Mental Health for mental health workers who travel to the affected areas around the State. Representative Willingham continued to ask if there would be a report generated from the Division of Mental Health on where these workers have worked because he has asked where they have been working, and nobody has any information and has seen them. Mr. Sprayberry said he would find out for him. Representative Willingham asked if funds can be shifted to other projects such as mitigation for specific areas. Mr. Sprayberry stated that allocated funds are designated to a specific agency, division, etc. and can't be transferred to another agency, division, etc. without changes in the law. He continued to state that the funds are available for hazard mitigation but the town council must act for the funds to be transferred. Representative White wanted to know what is being done to keep the railroads from not properly disposing of old railroad ties which is creating a problem with the stormwater system and debris removal in municipalities. Mr. Sprayberry responded this was the first time he had heard of this problem and will check into the situation.

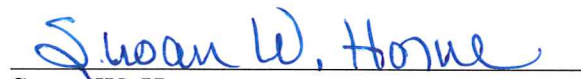
At this time, Representative Bell asked the Members of the Committee for their comments, input and recommendations. Representative McElraft remarked that she felt the rise of the sea level wasn't the issue but the debris removal of inland rivers and streams is more of

the problem for inland flooding. Representative White would like an answer regarding the proper removal of railroad ties. Representative Willingham would like a report on the mental health situation in affected areas and a resolution for the Town of Princeville. Representative Jones would like to recommend an offsite committee to visit areas that were devastated by the hurricane.

The Committee adjourned at 3:14 p.m.



Representative John R. Bell, IV
Presiding Chair



Susan W. Horne
Committee Clerk