

January 31, 2024



Statement from Bob White, Chairman, Currituck County Board of Commissioners:

As Chairman of the Currituck County Board of Commissioners, I must respond to false accusations recently made on social media about this Board. The majority of the Board has consistently acted in good faith and has taken great steps to provide transparency and openness in our actions. Several commissioners have served multiple terms on the Board – a sign that the citizens of Currituck County support our leadership.

Recently, however, this Board has been wrongly accused of violating North Carolina's open meeting laws. Social media posts on Facebook claim that six commissioners acted illegally by communicating with each other by email. This is an absurd claim, as email communication between commissioners is allowed. The chairman can and should poll the board when needed. I cannot and should not ever attempt to take unilateral action. Commissioner Paul Beaumont was found to have been involved in what appeared to have been an egregious violation of his office. The Board must be able to have communications with how to proceed in dealing with these issues. In doing so we are not going to involve him in our initial discussion. Only when we had a plan did we then move forward and inform Paul Beaumont.

At no time has the Board leveled a public accusation against Paul Beaumont. The Board discussed these issues with Commissioner Beaumont in closed session to hear his side of the story and gain more information. Commissioner Beaumont was afforded a quite conversation with us to keep what may have been erroneous information from becoming public, thus potentially assailing his image or standing.

Commissioner Beaumont of his own accord made the information public. He has told only half of the story for his own purposes. The Board wanted to gather information and have a full picture of events before casting judgment or going public.

The North Carolina open meetings law, which is codified in Article 33C of Chapter 143 of the North Carolina General Statutes requires official meetings of the Board of Commissioners be open to the general public after notice is provided, except when the law permits the Board to go into closed session. An official meeting occurs when there is **simultaneous** communication amongst a majority of the board members discussing county business. This includes in-person and electronic meetings; however, the key point is the meeting is held simultaneously amongst a majority of the members. In the instance called into question, I emailed the board regarding a matter of serious concern regarding a fellow commissioner.

I emailed the following commissioners: Selina Jarvis, Kitty Etheridge, Owen Etheridge, Kevin McCord, and Mike Payment. They responded over the span of two days. At no time were we

online together simultaneously and there was no action taken by the Board. The Board clearly did not violate North Carolina's open meetings law.

The topic was my concern over actions taken by Commissioner Beaumont. These concerns involved his treatment of staff and actions he took that misrepresented Currituck County and did not have the backing of a majority of the Board. A summary of these actions follows:

In November 2023, following the Board's evaluation of County Manager Ike McRee, Paul Beaumont informed me that he wanted to contact Insight Global, a head-hunting firm that helps identify candidates for executive level management positions. Paul Beaumont wanted to do this regarding the County Manager position. I notified other commissioners, and we were under the impression that he was just gathering information on the hiring process and how long it might take and associated costs. This information was to be used when we eventually needed to find Ike's successor. We have often had conversations about a succession plan, and what happens if the Manager is suddenly gone. It seems prudent for the county to understand and plan for this event. It was in this light that we should have the information for ourselves and future boards. We have recently tasked Ike with creating an action plan should we lose the manager in an unplanned way.

To be clear, Ike McRee is still under contract to serve as County Manager. As Ike McRee's contract was set to renew, we had discussion about that. As of today, his contract has now been renewed for a term of 3 years. Ike McRee has been a fixture in the county for 30 years. We should count ourselves very lucky to have someone of Ike's experience and dedication to manage Currituck County. Ike McRee is our County Manager now, and I hope he's here until the end of his career.

Paul Beaumont acted on his own to create a job listing with Insight Global for a County Manager. He did this without informing other commissioners and without first having a majority of the Board agree to this action. No contract was requested or signed by Currituck County to perform a search for a County Manager. Paul Beaumont says he did not create the listing, but we have multiple people confirming he was involved. The position description and salary were included in the listing. This did not, nor could not happen without some form of direct involvement on Paul Beaumont's part.

Insight Global will proceed to a point and not have a contract in place. When they present candidates and the applicant wants to move forward in the hiring process, then, a contract would be fully in place. Paul Beaumont claims no contracts were issued and that may in fact be true, but that apparently is not a problem for Insight.

In January, Paul Beaumont informed me that he had three potential candidates for the County Manager's position. I was caught off guard by this news and did not agree with this course of action. I later learned from Ike McRee that his job was listed on the internet. I called Paul Beaumont about this and told him to take it down. The next day, I spoke with Insight to have the posting removed. I scheduled a closed meeting to discuss this situation with Paul Beaumont and the entire Board.

Prior to this meeting, I emailed the other commissioners to gauge their reactions and receive input on what should be discussed. As explained earlier, this email communication was legal and did not constitute a simultaneous communication among the commissioners.

Paul Beaumont was informed of these emails in closed session. After obtaining copies he then alerted local citizens who posted false claims on social media that the Board was conducting illegal meetings. Citizens have also posted false claims that the Board is firing County Manager Ike McRee.

The Board instructed County Attorney Megan Morgan to gather more information. It was discovered that Paul Beaumont received 11 applications for the County Manager's position and told the team at Insight he was intrigued by one of the applicants. Again, he did this without the authority of a Board majority and without involving other commissioners, all while Ike is currently working as County Manager.

During the second closed session, no action was taken. Just prior to that meeting Megan Morgan let me know she had received more information. It became clear that we could no longer hold a closed session. We once again needed more information. As the BOC was present for the closed session, we had to open the meeting and then quickly close it. We had minor discussion during the meeting about the need to not hold the meeting and reached consensus that the meeting had no reason to continue. I called for a motion to adjourn, and I quickly closed the meeting to allow for more time to gather information. We are currently working to acquire documents related to the communications between Paul Beaumont and Insight Global.

Paul Beaumont's actions were not authorized by the Board and were very unprofessional. Commissioners are supposed to stand behind our county staff and support them, not demean them, or secretly work for their removal. Paul Beaumont frequently belittles or is condescending to our staff in public. This behavior can no longer be allowed. Not to mention that County Manager Ike McRee has certain rights under North Carolina's personnel laws that may have been violated.

Furthermore, Paul Beaumont's actions have caused county staff to be unsettled. We have great people working in this county and I am sorry for their having to endure this needless mess.

To our hard-working staff, thank you for all that you do and your professionalism in face of all of this. Be assured that Ike McRee will remain as our County Manager for the next several years!

No action has yet been taken against Paul Beaumont. The Board of Commissioners will resolve this situation in an open, public meeting.

At this time, it is important for the public to understand that no open meeting laws were violated by the Board of Commissioners. As commissioners, we work hard for the betterment of Currituck County, and I will continue to defend this Board against any accusations of impropriety.

Sincerely,
Bob White, Chairman
Currituck County Board of Commissioners