

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF McDOWELL
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – JANUARY 9, 2012**

ASSEMBLY

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, January 9, 2012, in the Commissioners' Board Room, the usual place of meeting.

MEMBERS PRESENT

David N. Walker, Chairman; Barry E. McPeters, Vice-Chairman; Andrew K. Webb; Michael K. Lavender; and Joshua R. Dobson.

OTHERS PRESENT

Charles R. Abernathy, County Manager; Carrie Padgett, Clerk to the Board; Ashley Wooten, Assistant to the County Manager (Filming); and reporter Mike Conley, for THE McDOWELL NEWS.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman David Walker called the meeting to order. The invocation was given by Commissioner Dobson, followed by the pledge of allegiance led by County Manger Chuck Abernathy.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of the December 12, 2011 regular session were presented for approval. Commissioner Webb made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Lavender, to approve the minutes as recorded. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The County Manager advised the item with Carol Price was taken off the agenda and would probably be scheduled for the February meeting. Therefore, the Tax Computer item could be moved up to 5:45. Also, Mr. Abernathy said he would probably do an update on Animal Outreach.

Upon motion by Commissioner Dobson and a second by Commissioner Lavender, the agenda was approved by a unanimous vote as amended.

BUDGET UPDATE AND FINANCE MATTERS

The County Manager made reference to the Tax Collector's report through December 31, 2011 showing a collection rate of 76.18%, two percentage points above last year for the same period. A new sales tax report was not available at this time; therefore the one from the previous meeting had been recopied. The levy, the vehicles, etc. continue to be monitored. Mr. Abernathy pointed out with this being a revaluation year, he feels pretty good about this situation thus far.

A question was raised as to how soon the revenue neutral could be revealed to the public. Mr. Abernathy addressed this with a legal answer, noting the sales ratio, etc. A general discussion followed.

The Finance Officer made reference to the list of EMS accounts that are considered non-collectible. These accounts totaled \$60,745.18. Mrs. Morgan requested that they be written off.

Discussion followed on the efforts the Finance Office staff makes in collecting delinquent accounts and how they deal with each one.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lavender, seconded by Commissioner Webb to approve the EMS debt setoff list as presented. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

OPEN LIBRARY NC PROJECT

County Library Director Elizabeth House came before the Board to request permission for the Library to participate in the Open Library NC Project, an initiative that is being undertaken state-wide by Library Directors and Counties. Each participating County will donate ten books to be digitized and added to the Open Library collection for free online loans to the patrons of all participating libraries. There will be no cost to the County to participate in this program.

A brief discussion followed.

A motion was made by Commissioner Lavender to approve the Library's participation in the e-book project as requested. Commissioner Webb seconded the motion and by unanimous approval, the motion carried.

TAX COMPUTER PRESENTATION

In a brief introduction, the County Manager pointed out the system the Tax Department currently has is 20+ years old and while no one has said our service will expire in a given space of time, continued maintenance will not be sustained indefinitely. He pointed out he was not asking for approval to purchase a new system, but rather was providing this as information with the suggestion of having a demonstration by the

company toward the end of January if the Board would be in agreement. Further, that staff was not suggesting an update to the current system but rather was making a new system proposal. Therefore, he would ask permission to proceed.

The Tax Assessor then gave an update on a meeting he and the Tax Collector had attended in Avery County where a demonstration was given. A proposal had been received from Bi-Tek in Charlotte. Mr. Renfro said he would get another quote.

Mr. Renfro advised he had done some research on the proposed system and those using it are very impressed. The Tax Collector commented on how impressed she was with the proposed system. Staff noted their interest in having a new system in place prior to the motor vehicle changes that will be going into effect soon.

In discussion, the County Manager advised he did not want to handle this through a request for proposal process, but did feel the need to have a workshop within two weeks with two or three vendors present. By consensus, the Board agreed to proceed as recommended by the County Manager with the vendors present.

CERTIFIED RETIREMENT COMMUNITY PRESENTATION

In a brief statement about this item, the County Manager advised cities have to be the applicant. He mentioned Givens Estates and their need of being first.

(Commissioner McPeters arrived at 5:58 p.m.)

GOLDEN LEAF UPDATE

Mr. Abernathy provided a general update on the application process at this point, noting that he hoped there is evidence as to the amount of work he has spent on it. He pointed out that input from the School System was received and there would be an education meeting on Tuesday.

In discussion, Mr. Abernathy explained how he came with square footage, the number of students in early college, space needed, etc. He advised he wanted to submit a small amount for construction of a road, noting that the City's application will benefit with the Ashworth Road aspect of the application.

Commissioner Lavender made a motion to approve the submission to Golden Leaf the grant request for Universal Career Pathways Skill Center and the Sugar Hill entrance to the Ashworth Road property that Mr. Abernathy is recommending. Commissioner Webb seconded the motion and by unanimous approval, the motion carried.

Concerning the process, Mr. Abernathy advised the dollar amount was received from the appraiser on Friday. He passed around pictures of the building and addressed some of the improvements to be made in the renovation process. He pointed out there is

time to secure grants to run water lines and that a survey is being done. He also mentioned bank bids, the tests needed etc., pointing out that he should have a report saying mold, asbestos and other issues have been checked.

WATER SYSTEM UPDATE

As an update, Mr. Abernathy pointed out the Contract will match up with the availability of funds that were budgeted. He pointed out the County will spend \$50,000 in the next six months so the process has already started and, while it is underway, we control the pace.

The access road was discussed. Mr. Abernathy noted there are three different ways into the property, and that an easement may exist.

Concerning Lonesome Pine Drive, Mr. Abernathy pointed out that he and Facility Maintenance Director Terry DePoyster had met with several of the home owners on this road. Mr. Abernathy suggested something the Board might want to consider is whether they want a policy with some flexibility to allow participation on the part of the home owners, etc. He advised staff was putting the County's water system on its GIS System and is working on some ballpark figures.

TAX MATTERS

The monthly listing of tax releases and refunds is summarized as follows:

Releases Under \$100.00	Amount released \$575.76
Releases Over \$100.00	Amount released \$18,273.04
Motor Vehicle/Releases Under \$100.00	Amount released \$393.11
Motor Vehicle Releases/Over \$100.00	Amount released \$779.99
Release Refunds	Amount refunded \$1,056.32

Commissioner Webb made a motion, seconded by Commissioner McPeters, to approve the tax releases and refunds as presented. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

The vacancy for an alternate member on the Planning Board was considered on second reading. There were two applicants.

Discussion followed on the comfort level of having someone currently serving on the Marion Planning and Zoning Board to also serve on the County Planning Board. The suggestion was made to defer the appointment for another month.

Commissioner Webb made a motion, seconded by Commissioner McPeters, to defer making the appointment for another month. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

CREATION OF UNIVERSAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

Chairman Walker asked Commissioner Webb to lead this discussion. Commissioner Webb made reference to the County Manager's condensed version of the process which he felt was fine. He said what he would like to see, as a Commissioner, was to bring more stakeholders into this process so there will be specific expertise that is used especially, and more importantly, with the utilization of the Community College portion. He noted for example that the Skills Center is 75,000 square feet and, in years to come, there will be other things the community may have an interest in doing. Commissioner Webb said he thought it would be good to bring in community and business stakeholders to ensure input from all sides as the process moves forward and as those at the table determine what is the highest and best use for years to come. He pointed out there is both a short and long term approach to doing this. Further, that McDowell Tech definitely should be right up front as they will be making a lot of recommendations that impact the curriculum, the transition process, who will relocate, etc. Also, representation by the Board of Commissioners and an at-large member, with an uneven amount of membership, and he suggested doing the process basically as it is being done with our current one. Commissioner Webb added that terms would be another thing to think about, with consecutive terms perhaps.

Based on Mr. Abernathy's memo, Commissioner Webb made the recommendation to consider the process as summarized, being open for amending or revising, and the sooner the better.

Discussion followed concerning the role of this committee in comparison to that of McDowell Tech's Board of Trustees and other related advisory committees, the benefit of having representation from the industry and business community, getting their input, etc.

A motion was made by Commissioner Webb to approve the Universal Building Committee based on the document before them, with the opportunity to amend or revise, etc. Commissioner McPeters seconded the motion and it passed by a vote of 4-1 with Commissioner Lavender casting the opposing vote.

CITIZEN COMMENT

No one had signed up to speak.

ANIMAL OUTREACH UPDATE

The County Manager advised the Animal Outreach group is set to open on January 15th, noting that 100 people were present when the training session for volunteers was held on the previous Saturday.

A brief discussion followed.

UPCOMING EVENTS

The 4-H Achievement Night will be held on Thursday, February 9, 2012, at 6:00 p.m. The event will be at the Senior Center.

The Community Forum on Prescription Drug Abuse will be held on Friday, January 13th, at McDowell Tech from 9:00-10:45 a.m.

Mr. Abernathy pointed out the reporter for THE McDOWELL NEWS wants to do a story on the Pilot Plant. There will be a tour of the facility on Thursday, January 12th, at 3:15 p.m. with the committee of growers.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to transact at this time, upon motion by Commissioner McPeters, a second by Commissioner Dobson and with unanimous approval, the meeting was adjourned.

DAVID N. WALKER, CHAIRMAN

CARRIE PADGETT
CLERK TO THE BOARD