

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – MARCH 8, 2021**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, March 8, 2021, at 5:00 p.m., at the Universal Conference Room, 634 College Drive, Marion, North Carolina.

Members Present

Tony Brown, Chair; Brenda Vaughn; Chris Allison; Patrick Ellis

Members Absent

David N. Walker, Vice-Chair (joined the meeting at 5:06pm)

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Cheryl Mitchell, Clerk to the Board

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order. The invocation was given by Commissioner Allison, followed by the pledge of allegiance, led by Commissioner Ellis.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Vaughn made a motion, second by Commissioner Allison, to approve the February 8, 2021 Regular Session, and February 15, 2021 Regular Session, and February 15, 2021 Closed Session minutes as presented. By a vote of 4-0, the motion carried.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to add approval of Department Head positions for hiring under new business.

Commissioner Vaughn made a motion to approve the agenda with the addition, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion carried.

Vice Chairman Walker joined the meeting at 5:06pm.

Railroad History Project

Mayor Steve Little gave a presentation on the RAIL Memorial Project, Inc. The construction of the Mountain Division of the Western North Carolina Railroad is the section between Henry Station just west of Old Fort and the Swannanoa Gap at Ridgecrest. The construction is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest human accomplishments in both engineering and construction in the entire US at the time it occurred.

RAIL stands for Railroad and Incarcerated Laborers, due to 95% of the workforce who performed the construction were convicts from the NC State Penitentiary in Raleigh.

Request was made for support and endorsement of the RAIL Memorial Project, Inc by the Board of Commissioners.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to endorse the project due to the importance of the railroad to the history of the county, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

COVID-19/Vaccine Update

Mr. William Kehler gave the following update:

- Day 358 at the EOC for COVID-19 under Level 1 Activation
- 40,542 tests conducted; 4,779 positives; 76 deaths; 14-day positivity rate is 10.9%
- No congregate assisted living facilities have any outbreaks
- Vaccine Doses Administered: 1st Doses: 7,456; 2nd Doses: 4,773; total doses 11,827
- 1243 calls into vaccine call line
- Anticipate moving to Group 4 on March 24th
- Over 1500 vaccinations were done on Friday

Chairman Brown on behalf of all the Board voiced his appreciation for all the work of the staff at Emergency Services.

Ordinance Public Hearings

Chairman Brown declared the Board in Public Hearing setting at 5:30pm, pursuant to NCGS 160D-601 for the purpose of amending the Telecommunications Tower Ordinance. The proposed amendment was to increase the allowable height of towers from 150 feet to 199 feet.

There were no comments from the public.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to close the Public Hearing at 5:31pm, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Chairman Brown declared the Board in Public Hearing setting at 5:32pm, pursuant to NCGS 160D-601 for the purpose of amending the Lake James Protection Ordinance. The proposed amendment would allow trams and steps as permitted means of access to the water/shoreline.

There were no comments from the public.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to close the Public Hearing at 5:33pm, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the amendment to the Telecommunications Tower Ordinance and the Lake James Protection Ordinance, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

G5 Trail Collective Update

Camp Grier G5 Trail Collective's Old Fort Trails Project update was given by Jason McDougal. The trail plan started with 25 miles from USFS, and has now grown into 42 miles. His request was for funding to assist with permitting costs. Tourism Development Authority had agreed to provide \$20,000 of the \$50,000 needed for the design and development need.

Vice Chairman Walker noted this is a great project and opportunity for the citizens of the county.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to donate \$10,000 and then see what is available as the Board goes into their budget meetings, second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion carried.

Freedom Life Update

Danny Hampton, Executive Director of Freedom Life Ministries, presented two partnership opportunities for consideration of the Board. The first item was Freedom Life/McDowell Mission Permanent Housing Partnership Proposal.

Ms. Arwen March, Director of McDowell Mission Ministries, spoke on a grant program available through Community Development Block Grant funding. The Housing for McDowell's Hard-to-House project will provide programming to keep families stable and productive. If approved the CDBG for the project would flow through the county and would cover the cost of project administration. Property rehabilitation and new construction would take place throughout the county.

Request was for the administration of the grant if awarded to be handled by the Finance Dept. of the county.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to endorse the McDowell's Hard-to-House program, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten noted the Finance Director, Ms. Bell had given approval to support the grant.

The second item was Freedom Life/McDowell Substance Use Coalition Opioid Settlement Funding Partnership Proposal. In 2013 the coalition was formed as a part of the Health Coalition. The mission of the Substance Use Coalition is using advocacy, education, and empowerment to ensure McDowell County is a community where substance use prevention, treatment, and sustainable recovery are possible. The Coalition's Blue Ridge Recovery Rally is a successful event that has been held for the last three years.

Request presented was for the Substance Use Coalition be a viable source for the distribution of the opioid settlement funds, in partnership with the county.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to endorse the work of the Substance Use Coalition and when money is awarded from the opioid lawsuit, there will be discussions between staff and the Board on how to distribute, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Mr. Hampton also announced there will be a community event at Big League Camp on Thursday, June 17, 2021 at 6:30pm. Darryl Strawberry will be the featured speaker at the event.

Public Shooting Range Update

Construction continues on the public shooting range project. Progress has been very slow lately due to wet weather and soil. The bridge contractor is onsite and beginning the bridge abutment construction. The bridge superstructure is scheduled for delivery mid-to-late April.

Emergency Services Building Update

Station 4 is complete and a grand opening and ribbon cutting will take place on Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 8:30am. The Station will be operational on that date.

The Headquarters construction continues. Pictures were included in the packet.

Budget Process Update

Mr. Wooten noted staff had started to receive departmental budgets, and department meetings would soon take place. Departments this year will complete a capital needs facility plan. The form will help staff plan for capital needs over the coming years.

Mr. Wooten noted he and the Chairman had already met with the MTCC Board of Trustees to review their capital needs and budget.

The Board will meet with the School Board next month.

Administrative Items

Per Board's request at the last meeting, staff brought the draft Extended Paid Sick Leave Policy for review and consideration. A copy of the draft policy is with the agenda materials. The policy would expire June 30, 2021. Under the previous Emergency Paid Sick leave the Federal law expired in December 2020.

Discussion followed regarding COVID vaccinations and exposures, and surrounding counties COVID policies.

Commissioner Ellis noted several businesses do not offer paid sick leave for COVID related absences and his recommendation was to not approve the policy.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion not to adopt the Extended Paid Sick Leave Policy, second by Vice Chairman Walker. Discussion followed. Commissioner Vaughn noted county employees have an opportunity to use the leave time already given by the county. Mr. Wooten reviewed the sick and vacation time accrual policy. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Staff requested approval of two new titles to the Employee Position List. The first was under Step 3, Level 63 Public Safety: Incident Management Team – Technician; and the second was Step 3, Level 65 Clerical Supervisor. Existing employees are filling the new titles.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the two titles added to the position list, second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Staff presented non-collectible EMS transport bill write-offs totaling \$54,956.46.

Commissioner Vaughn made a motion to approve \$54,956.46 of EMS write-offs, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Budget Amendments

- GF-36 Appropriates revenue to cover additional early tax payment discounts
- GF-37 Appropriates revenue for veterinary expenses
- GF-38 Transfer between line items in Waste Collections
- GF-39 Transfer between line items in the Register of Deeds budget
- GF-40 Transfers between line items and appropriates grants and designated revenue in the Sheriff's Office

- GF-41 Transfer between line items to cover the housing of juvenile offenders
- GF-42 Transfer between line items and appropriates grant and donation revenue in the Senior Center budget

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve all budget amendments as presented, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Tax Matters

MV tax refunds	\$ 1,231.29
Refunds	\$ 14,070.38
Release over \$100	\$ 19,099.52
Release under \$100	\$ 192.16
Discoveries	\$ 13,287.24

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve all tax matters, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By unanimous vote of 5-0, the motion carried.

Board Appointment

The Planning Board's one vacancy was presented as a first reading. The Clerk will advertise the vacancy and bring applications to next month's meeting.

Citizen Comment

Chairman Brown opened the floor for public comments at 6:40pm.

Richard McEntire spoke on the Noise Ordinance concerning a Walker Town Road resident. He said there were dogs barking all night, fights, loud music, and the resident has been fined numerous times. Mr. McEntire had called the Sheriff's Office numerous times, and had been told there was nothing they could do. He suggested changes to the ordinance, since this had been going on for 6 years.

Public comment ended at 6:52pm.

Closed Session

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go into Closed Session at 6:53pm pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)6 personnel discussion, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to go out of Closed Session at 7:10p.m., second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

No action was taken.

REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

There were no reports.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to transact at this time, upon motion by Commissioner Vaughn, second by Commissioner Allison, the meeting was adjourned at 7:11pm.

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown
Chairman