

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – March 13, 2023**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, March 13, 2023, at 5:00 p.m., in the Commissioner’s Board Room, 69 N Main St., Marion, NC.

Members Present

Tony G. Brown, Chairman; David N. Walker, Vice-Chairman; Chris Allison; Patrick Ellis; Lynn Greene

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Victoria Craig, Clerk to the Board

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. The invocation was given by Commissioner Greene. The pledge of allegiance was given by Commissioner Ellis.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the February 13, 2023 Regular Session minutes and the February 20, 2023 Regular Session minutes, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Approval of Agenda

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the March 13, 2023 agenda, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

National Board-Certified Teacher Recognition

Interim Superintendent Brian Oliver introduced the four teachers who have obtained their National Board Certification this year: Marlean Duncan (not present), Ashley Greene, Donna Pyatt, and Daniel Smith. There is a total of 51 teachers in McDowell County who hold the National Board Certification. The teachers took a moment to share the testimonies of their experience with the strenuous process. According to the website nbpts.org, “National Board Certification is the most respected professional certification available in education and provides numerous benefits to teachers, students, and schools. It was designed to develop, retain and recognize accomplished teachers and to generate ongoing improvement in schools nationwide.”

Parks and Recreation Update

Black Bear Park Lease and Operation

Jennifer Bennett presented to the Board on behalf of Duke Energy regarding updates to the Black Bear site. Duke Energy has provided a lease agreement at no cost. If approved, Duke Energy and McDowell County would enter into an Access Area Improvement Initiative (AAll) lease for McDowell County to manage and maintain Black Bear Access Area facilities.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the AAll lease with Duke Energy, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Shooting Range Update

Chad Marsh, Parks and Recreation Director, provided an update on the McDowell County Shooting Range. Mr. Marsh has been approached by a community archery club, Shooting Stars, to host several tournaments at the range over the next few months. The club would provide insurance coverage and staffing for the event.

Commissioner Greene made a motion to approve the dates of March 25th, April 15th, May 27th and July 8th for Shooting Stars to host tournaments at the McDowell County Shooting Range with fees waved and on the days of those tournaments, the Shooting Range will be closed to the public, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Operational Updates

Mr. Marsh gave an update on the recent basketball season. He informed the Board that he does have intentions to proceed with the way that he held the season. He stated that over 815 kids are signed up for little league baseball.

2023 Property Revaluation Update

In 2019, the Board of Commissioners passed a resolution moving the County from an eight-year to a four-year revaluation cycle. As noted at that time, a four-year cycle is recommended by the NC Department of Revenue and is also a very common schedule currently employed by 43 other counties in the state.

Last week property owners received notices of new values. These notices were sent in accordance with NC General Statute 105. It is the assessor's responsibility to send these notices in the revaluation year. The notices are required to provide the property owner the market value as determined by the Schedule of Values. The Schedule, which was adopted last fall, is based on sales data for properties in McDowell County.

It was noted by Tim Cain at a prior meeting that McDowell County would like face significant value increases due to market conditions. This trend has been seen throughout North Carolina for counties that are also doing revaluation in 2023. McDowell County experienced an approximate 43% increase in property value increase for the entire base (which includes taxable and nontaxable property). The approximate increase in value for taxable properties was approximately 35%.

Property owners were provided instructions in their letters outlining the appeal process. As has been previously noted, property owners have multiple appeal opportunities starting with informal appeals with County staff.

Chairman Brown and Vice-Chairman Walker encouraged citizens to go through the appeal process if they feel like their property revaluation is incorrect.

Building Projects

Services Building

The project architect CBSA has completed the baseline drawings but has not begun the drawings for the proposed renovation work. Staff and the architect have met with the Probation/Parole staff to determine what code requirements they have for the space. The architect has the requirements and is working on floorplans. Mr. Wooten has requested that work be reviewed by the end of March.

Old EMS Station

An offer for the building structure was made on the GovDeals platform. However, that offer was withdrawn. Mr. Wooten asked for guidance from the Board on what the next steps should be.

Commissioner Ellis stated that he would like to see the sale of the building to be posted on GovDeals for two more weeks as well as a for sale sign out front for people who don't browse GovDeals.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to keep the building posted on GovDeals as well as posting a for sale sign outside of the building for individuals who don't browse GovDeals until April 15th, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Transfer Station Repairs

Staff submitted the EPA grant for transfer station improvements at the end of February. The awards will be announced in April. The recommendation is to move forward with bidding on the transfer station structure itself after the award announcements if the County is not on the list.

Pavement Assessment Plan

The engineers have submitted the final pavement assessment report. Staff recommends following its recommendations for budgeting. Several of the lots are currently in the process of procurement for improvements including the Mental Health Building and the Sugar Hill Convenience Center.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion that moving forward, there should be \$200,000 annually set aside for paving of County-owned property parking lots, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the Pavement Access Plan, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Water System Projects

- The State has granted access to go to bid on Phase 1 of the Nebo Water System expansion. That bid is expected to be posted in the paper in the next two weeks.
- McGill Associates has begun the design work for the Hoppy Tom Hollow Water Project. The anticipated bid date is scheduled for July 2024.
- An Appalachian Regional Commission grant to extend water around Exit 90 has been submitted and is pending a decision from Federal officials.
- The study of water service to the West Marion Elementary Area is complete. Staff has requested a meeting with the engineer to review the findings. An ARC pre-application was accepted and the County has applied.
- The \$2.8 million grant for the East End project along NC 126 was awarded. Staff is awaiting the official award letter.

Opioid Agreements

The Board approved several opioid settlement allocations at February's Board meeting. There is a resolution that outlines how the funding will be allocated. Staff has also requested a contract template from the NC Association of County Commissioners for each of the funded agencies. While a template was not available by the packet deadline, staff requests authorization to enter into a funding agreement with each entity. The agreement will cover the responsibilities of each party.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the resolution and authorization to enter into an agreement with the entities listed for the opioid settlement allocation, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Pilot Plant

The Board authorized staff to explore the sale of the former pilot plant a number of weeks ago. The first step of that process was to seek an appraisal.

The appraised value of the building according to the appraisal firm is \$250,000. They placed a value of \$3,100 on the equipment. One of the prospective buyers has indicated an interest in buying an acre beyond what is currently developed as the building site. The appraiser set a value of \$18,000 for an acre, though he did misidentify the area that had been discussed as being surplus. There has been an offer of \$275,000 to purchase the old Pilot Plant.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the offer for \$275,000, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Budget Update

The property tax collection report shows a collection rate of 97.14% through February. Several budget amendments and one project ordinance amendment were presented to the Board.

- GE 32 - Transfers funds between line items and appropriates reserved funds grant and collection revenue for Emergency Services.
- GF 33 - Transfers funds between line items in Finance.
- GF 34 - Appropriate reserved funds for Library planning.
- GE 35 - Transfers between line items at Waste Collections.
- GE 36 - Transfers between line items and appropriate grant and reserved revenues.
- GE 37 - Transfers between line items in Tax Assessing.
- GF 38 - Appropriates ARPA funds for the West Marion Elementary water study.
- GE 39 - Appropriates program revenue and transfers between line items in Parks and Recreation.
- GE 40 - Adjusts revenue and transfers between line items at DSS.
- GE 41 - Transfers between line items in the Transit budget.
- GE 42 - Transfers between line items in the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council.
- SPI - Amends the School Project Fund.
- The final amendment for the N Main Street Project Ordinance

Commissioner Greene made a motion to approve the budget items, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Golden Leaf SITE Grant

The Golden Leaf Foundation has announced an additional round of funding for the SITE program, which is currently being used to grade the property near Universal that will eventually be sold to Forza for their manufacturing plant. Golden Leaf has indicated that the County can now apply for additional funding to make additional improvements to other areas of the Universal property. Staff proposes to apply for a grant that is due later in the week for a maximum of \$1.5 million dollars for rough grading.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the grant submission, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Board of Education Calendar Request

The McDowell County Board of Education has requested support from the Commissioners to send a resolution to legislation approving calendar flexibility in the County.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the resolution supporting the McDowell County Board of Education to have local control of school calendars, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Marion Fire Department SAFER Grant

The City of Marion has identified a grant opportunity that would pay for three firefighters at 100% for three years before local dollars would need to be appropriated. The interlocal agreement requires County approval of any grant submission.

After considerable discussion, Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the SAFER Grant submission but he wants to see what the City projects its budget to be after the 3-year

period to identify cost increases and try to avoid raising the fire tax, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Administrative Items

There were EMS write-offs totaling \$37,604.38.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve administrative items, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Board Appointments

There was a second reading for the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council. They are seeking a faith-based seat member.

The Historic Preservation Commission has been reinstated and is seeking members.

There was a second reading for the Library Board of Trustees. There were two seats available on the Board and three applicants. There was a vote of 5-0 to approve Liza W. Holmes and Shearon McIntosh Cline to serve on the Library Board of Trustees.

Tax Matters

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve tax matters, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Citizen Comment

Commissioner Greene made a motion for a 5-minute recess at 6:19 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Brown called the meeting back to order at 6:25 p.m.

Ronnie Burgin, Lee Chasteen, Dean Moore, Kevin Revis, Eddie Anderson, Paul Bartlett, and Dean Young all expressed major concerns with the recent property revaluation.

Carl Becker spoke on behalf of Marilyn Foreman regarding the animal shelter. Mr. Wooten informed Mr. Becker that he would call Ms. Foreman.

Commissioners/Staff Reports

There were no reports.

Adjournment

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to adjourn at 6:43 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Victoria Craig
Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown
Chairman