

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION- September 11, 2023

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, September 11, 2023, at 5:00 p.m., in the Commissioners 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

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Charity Turner-Coates, 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 Gage Hunt with Boy Scout Troop 369, Marion.

Approval of Minutes

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the August 14, 2023, Regular Session minutes, the August 21, 2023, Regular Session minutes, as well as the closed session minutes on that date. Commissioner Allison seconded the motion. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Approval of the Agenda

Commissioner Allison made a motion to approve the September 11, 2023 agenda and was seconded by Vice Chairman Walker who added the approval of the closed session after the completion of the regular session for a personnel matter. Chairman Brown seconded the addition. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Introduction of the Board to the Clerk

Chairman Brown welcomed the Clerk to the Board Charity Turner-Coates.

NCACC Youth Voice Participant Introduction

Chairman Brown invited Chad Ray who introduced Youth Voice participant Miss Gracie Davis.

Miss Davis attended the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Annual Conference in Raleigh, NC last month with Commissioner Allison, Commissioner Greene, and

County Manager Wooten; she represented McDowell County youth. Miss Gracie Davis is involved with the FFA Program at McDowell High School and is involved with 4-H locally.

Chairman Brown discussed the positive impact of the FFA Program. Commissioner Greene shared how impressed he was with Miss Davis.

The Board spoke of their appreciation for the leadership of Mr. Chad Ray for his years of service and devotion to Cooperative Extension.

Transit Funding Public Hearing

Chairman Brown declared a public hearing for the purposes of discussing and receiving comments on transportation funding. Chairman Brown introduced Mr. Jason Hollifield with Public Transportation.

Mr. Hollifield updated the Commissioners on the Admin grant - \$192,903.00, which is matched at 15 percent by the county, and the Capital grant - \$195,903.00, which is matched by the county at 10 percent. The Capital grant will be used to purchase two new wheelchair vehicles. Mr. Hollifield informed the Commissioners of the increased use of public transportation.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to accept the information as presented and was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Hollifield updated the Commissioners on the Mobility for Everyone Everywhere grant, which will provide additional public transportation. The public will be able to use an app to schedule and arrange transportation. He stated the program has been successful in surrounding counties. The name of the program will be McDowell Connector.

Fire and Rescue Contracts

Emergency Service Director, William Kehler provided updates on the proposed final contract for fire and rescue for the county.

Commissioner Ellis clarified that amendments could be made at any time in the future. Mr. Wooten confirmed amendments could be made at any time.

Motion made by Commissioner Ellis, seconded by Commissioner Allison to accept the contracts. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Walker questioned if staff with the Rescue Squad are required to be certified and asked for such language to be included in all contracts. Mr. Kehler confirmed the contract included the information requested by Mr. Walker.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion for funds designated for the Rescue Squad to remain designated for the Rescue Squad and fire funding to remain designated for Fire Services. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Water Project Update

County Manager Wooten provided the board with an update on the water project for Nebo area phase 1A and 1B, Universal and West Marion Elementary School. Mr. Wooten presented an administrative contract for the Exit 90 water grant. The staff of the Foothills Regional Commission would administer the grant.

A motion was made to approve by Vice Chairman Walker and was seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

County Manager Wooten introduced Mr. Abernathy and Mr. McLaughlin, who were present to discuss the progress of the housing development in the Nebo area, which would potentially partner with the county.

Commissioner Ellis expressed he wanted to be fair to the county and individuals within the county.

Commissioner Lynn Greene asked for the proposal to be provided in written form in the future.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the partnership and to revisit it at the next meeting on September 18, 2023. At that time, a written contract would be provided and it should include the duties and responsibilities of both parties. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Capital Update

County Manager Wooten updated the Board on numerous items.

The Recreation Center project is still pending. The state budget has not been released so any decision-making has been placed on hold. The lowest bid for this project is approximately 10.4 million and the county has approximately 4 million available for this project. The architects are aware of the situation and understand the items are currently on hold.

The Service Building project has the architect's drawing and estimated cost.

There is not an updated drawing for the Animal Shelter at this time. A local resident, who is not an employee of the county, has reached out to inquire about having a fund-raising event to help assist with the costs of a new Animal Shelter.

The Pilot Plant was sold and the new buyers are working to return the facility to operation.

The EMS building on Garden Street has been removed, though the foundation remains. An engineer will help put together a plan for an additional parking area. There have been discussions with the City Council about a partnership for the project.

There is also concern about an old gas tank under the ground in this area and what the process of removal would consist of. There will be additional research and information gathered and shared with the Board in the future.

Broadband Update

The County Manager updated the Board on the progress in the area of Broadband availability for County residents. He advised the Board that they heard from Spectrum last month about their grant-funded plans. Staff will continue to work toward finding the best funding options, in order to reach as many households as possible.

Universal Property Items

The County Manager provided updates on the Universal Property to the Board. The County Attorney, Fred Coats is currently working on the completion of the legal paperwork for the deed. This should be completed within the next couple of weeks. County Manager Wooten stated this is an opportunity for the County to sell property, which will in turn contribute to the tax rate roll.

A motion was made by Vice Chairman Walker and seconded by Commissioner Allison for the City to County transfer. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Old Fort Request

County Manager Wooten informed the Board, that the County currently owned a water tank in the town of Old Fort. The Old Fort township needs the water tank for upgrades to its drinking water system.

A motion was made by Commissioner Greene to approve the easement and transfer the title of the water tank to the town of Old Fort. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Walker acknowledged the Town of Old Fort had donated a swimming pool and two ball fields to the county.

Property Tax Relief

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

WHEREAS, McDowell County is required by North Carolina statutes and the North Carolina Constitution to fund certain services; and

WHEREAS, the delivery of public services is dependent on available revenue; and

WHEREAS, McDowell County relies heavily on property tax revenue to fund services; and

WHEREAS, McDowell County is required by current law to treat all taxpayers the same with very few exemptions; and

WHEREAS, the existing property tax exemptions are very limited and apply only to elderly taxpayers under a household income of \$36,700 as well as for 100% disabled veterans with a service-related disability; and

WHEREAS, certain states treat different categories of ownership differently for taxation such as exempting certain portions of a primary residence from taxation.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the McDowell County Board of Commissioners do hereby request that General Assembly improve property tax exemptions for elderly property owners and disabled veterans by allowing for greater household income limits with frequent adjustments due to inflation and to allow for a greater exemption for disabled veterans respectively; and

AND FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the McDowell County Board of Commissioners also request the General Assembly study and implement different property tax classifications for non-primary residences.

ADOPTED this day, the 11th of September, 2023.

The motion was made to adopt the Resolution by Commissioner Greene and seconded by Vice Chairman Walker.

Vice Chairman Walker noted he also would like for the rise of inflation to be considered. Mr. Walker stated the Board wants to advocate for our County and the residents in the General Assembly of the State.

Commissioner Ellis noted it should be revisited for disabled veterans as well.

Chairman Brown added his concern for elderly citizens. He stated most of the elderly only receive social security as income and if there is an opportunity to help them, it should happen.

By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Budget Reports

The County Manager updated the Board on budget reports and explained the property tax collection rate is lower due to the time the items were mailed out and there was one more month to accrue in sales tax.

Administrative Items

The County Manager updated the Board on EMS billing write-offs and two Nebo water leak adjustments.

The motion made by Commissioner Greene to accept the administrative items was seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Tax Matters

The County Manager presented a request from Linda Onufrey, Tax Collector, to charge off uncollected taxes for the 2012 tax year in the amount of \$ 106,333.42 as of August 31, 2023. The amount was not included in the accounts receivable annual audit report because by statute the funds were not collectible.

Mr. Wooten presented the monthly tax releases, refunds, and discoveries.

Refunds- \$5,305.64

Releases Under \$100.00- \$246.66

Release Over \$100.00- \$3,161.68

Discoveries- \$4,380.91

Vehicle Refund- \$1,158.00

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to accept and was seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Board Appointments

There was a second reading for numerous boards and committees.

- Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC): one vacancy for a faith-based seat
- Library Board of Trustees: Two vacancies- one for the Marion district and one for the Old Fort district.
- Transportation Advisory Board: one vacancy

The first reading for Historic Preservation Commission: two vacancies. Members must demonstrate an interest and background in history.

The following appointments were made by unanimous vote:

Silvia Martin del Campo was appointed to the Library Board of Trustees.

Kayla DiChristina was appointed to the Transportation Advisory Board.

The County Manager informed the Board the McDowell County Library Board was requesting an amendment be approved to the by-laws that will allow remote voting.

A motion was made by Commissioner Walker to deny the request and seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Citizen Comment

No citizen comments

Commissioners/Staff Reports

County Manager Wooten informed the Board they had been invited by the Carson House to host the October meeting. They request the meeting begin at 4:00 p.m.

A motion was made to move the October meeting to Carson House at 4 p.m. and was seconded by Commissioner Allison.

Chairman Brown requested all Unit Supervisors be present at the meeting at the September 18, 2023 meeting at McDowell DSS.

Motion made to move the September 18, 2023, to McDowell DSS by Commissioner Walker, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Closed Session

A motion made by Commissioner Greene to go into closed session for personnel matters was seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed. The Board went into a closed session at 6:07 p.m.

During the closed session, personnel matters were discussed in reference to issues within McDowell DSS and staff behavior concerns.

Chairman Brown made a motion to return to the open session at 6:46 p.m. and was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Motion made to adjourn by Commissioner Ellis and seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Charity Turner-Coates
Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown
Chairman