

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – June 17, 2024**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, June 17, 2024, at 11:30 a.m., in the Commissioner's Board Room, 69 N Main St., Marion, NC.

Members Present

David N. Walker, Chairman; Tony Brown, Vice-Chair; Chris Allison and Lynn Greene

Members Absent

Patrick Ellis

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Sena A. Allison, Clerk to the Board; Kim Welborn, Board of Elections Director and Bobbie Sigmon; DSS Director

Call to Order

Chairman Walker called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m.

Board of Elections Request

Chairman Walker asked the County Manager to begin, in which Mr. Wooten reminded the Board that the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget was presented on May 23, 2024. He said there are internal questions towards what is detailed within the budget.

The Board has been asked to review a need by the Board of Elections for a full-time position, which Kim Welborn will be sharing the details of this position to the Board.

Chairman Walker invited Ms. Welborn to the podium to speak to the Board, in which she recognized four Board of Election Board Members, along with one Board Representative of the Republican party. She thanked the Board for their time and began with the importance for an additional full-time staff position, and told they currently have 3 full time staff but with the growth of the County and all the Legislative changes, their work load has increased tremendously. She is proposing to hire a GIS, IT Elections Specialist and discussed the duties to which they are short staffed, with the requisites within the current staff to fill the extra burdens they each add to their work load to ensure the proficiently of the department.

Ms. Welborn spoke on the correct mapping, districts and precincts according to the NC General Statutes requirements. She told that the 911 addresses covering 2023 and the first 5

months of 2024, have a total of 3,483 new and corrected addresses, which includes 2024 having 935 adds and adjustments. The Director stated this is very time consuming as they work as liaisons to the 911 and tax department for keeping up with research and the daily changes that have to be input that could cause noncompliance in this area, resulting in a re-election. She cited proper mapping with very detailed entry could have a detrimental outcome at election times for ballots.

She went over duties they do as; implement School Mapping, to ensure property districting, files that the County has to extend to the State, a need for an onsite Tech person, social media coordinator, Cyber Security and Homeland Security communication, testing of voting equipment prior to elections, that would save money as it is subcontracted out currently. She told their office conducts community education through Civic organizations, festivals, the library, the Senior Center and how they are required by law to conduct Voter ID seminars and how data and public record requests have increased vastly in the last years.

Ms. Welborn gave a spreadsheet on what surrounding Counties that are comparative to McDowell as the number of staffs in their Elections department, and told of being good stewards by acquiring voting booths from another County to save approximately \$16,000.00 along with combining precincts for the 2nd primary in May, they saved \$20,000.00. She stated with the ability to save the County money through those 2 occasions, this may help acquire the additional employee they are requesting.

Vice Chair Brown asked Ms. Welborn to give a description on what the 3 employees do currently, in which she stated they all do the tasks that need to be done and it is not just one part of an outline of duties. Vice Chair Brown stated it sounds like a team effort.

Chairman Walker asked for an explanation of the GIS, which was given by Ms. Welborn as detailing the addressing and districts. Chairman asked her to go over what would trigger a re-election, whereas the Director told the County has 2 precincts that are split that represent different House districts and if within one had a few votes between the candidates where 10 voters were given the wrong ballot, and 3 votes differed, there could be a new election. Jane Dale asked to speak to this, and went over the way the Jurisdiction lines are drawn and how the submission into the NC GIS precisely leads to not having voters that are in the wrong District or County. Ms. Dale stated there needed to be someone constantly looking in the GIS audit report, to ensure accuracy.

A general discussion was had, on the comparison of Staff between Counties surrounding ours, in which Chairman Walker requested the numbers for Mitchell, Burke and Rutherford as our neighbors. Commissioner Greene asked what the GIS part of the position would be compared to the mapping person's responsibility at the courthouse, in which Ms. Dale said it is a combination of NC Elections, the 911 addressing and the McDowell GIS to create a 3- fold job that takes a lot of time. Commissioner Greene directed to the County Manager, on whether the 911 and GIS addresses would not together show where a person lives, in which Mr. Wooten said they independently do the corrections or additions. Commissioner Greene asked if this would be more of an overlap than a duplication, in which Ms. Dale answered yes. He then asked if this year's budget could not support a full- time position, would they be able to continue with a part- time person, in which Ms. Welborn answered they would make due with what the Board's decision is.

Commissioner Greene asked Ms. Welborn in McDowell County, what her confidence level was with the last 2 Presidential elections, whereas she responded 100% accurate.

Vice Chair Brown commended the Director and the staff for their hard work, and Commissioner Allison extended his appreciation to her and the staff as well.

Chairman Walker asked if anyone on from the Board of Elections wanted to speak, in which Kay House came forward. Ms. House spoke on behalf of the need to an additional position within the Elections department, giving credit to how hard the staff works and how crucial it is to the accuracy of addresses. She proposed a start date for this position to begin July 1st, as this year's election will have a big turn out and with the additional Voter ID requirements. Ms. House thanked the Board for listening to her and told the Chairman she would email him the staff numbers for Mitchell, Burke and Rutherford County.

Chairman Walker declared the Board would discuss the request presented by the Board of Elections for an additional position and thanked them for their service to fair elections, along with the proactive work they do for our Community.

DSS Update

Chairman Walker called Bobbie Sigmon to speak on updates with DSS, and she started with the percentage of Child Welfare Assessments at 95.8% and Foster care at 99% where staff is having to stay more with children in the last month, in Meg's Place. There have been 5 children rotating in and out. She stated that a total of \$20,000.00 in special State funding had been used to keep the children out of the DSS office and for staff not to have to spend the night as much. Chairman Walker asked whether this money has been used as increase pay to foster parents, in which Ms. Sigmon said yes, and gave examples of children who required a higher level of care and how these funds were given to these cases.

Commissioner Greene asked the ages of the children rotating at Meg's Place, whereas Ms. Sigmon answered one 14-year-old female, two 14-year-old males, one 11-year-old male and a 9-year-old female.

Ms. Sigmon went on to say they are at 93 children in care, they finished up the physical year for adoptions and met the goal of 13, in which the County gets more funding due to the goal being met. She told that since May 31st there have been an additional 2 adoptions.

Ms. Sigmon stated they are recruiting new foster parents, by virtual training, 1 on 1 foster training, yard signs and participating in festivals to get more involvement and awareness. She included finding many foster parents have let their license lapse for various circumstances. Chairman Walker suggested to design a Flyer where churches can also have on display and addressed how a quickened placement leading to adoption is exceedingly better for the child.

The Director moved to the struggle under Adult Services increasing as they are getting more guardian cases from the court, and in certain rulings she is having to make difficult medical calls. Chairman Walker asked how many cases DSS currently has, in which she stated 48, and 17 of which the County pays their bills. A general discussion was had on all guardian cases being court ordered and several cases where the people are being placed in McDowell County, who are not from or living in this County. She told how the cases of individuals from

other Counties go to our Clerk of Court. The hearings are completed under Judicial ruling based on the location the individuals are found. Ms. Sigmon stated how Adult Services have different statutes than Child Services, whereas Chairman Walker cited the need to be a goal to the NCACC to look at equal statutes for Adult Services as Child Services have. Ms. Sigmon stated the manual for Adult Services has not been updated since the 1980's.

Ms. Sigmon proceeded to the DSS recertifications for family and children Medicaid with a higher number already than last year and as of June 1st there are 15,279 people on Medicaid and 2,659 on Medicaid Expansion. She said every person who comes in for Medicaid gets evaluated for every program they have to ensure eligibility. A general discussion was had to the continuing changes and work loads they are obtaining, the need to fill open positions and why the positions were open.

The Director communicated to the Board that from July of 2023 to March of 2024 \$83,488,121.93 in public benefits flowed into the community.

Commissioner Greene asked the County Manager about the request on the Agenda for approval of the (MOU) Memorandum of Understanding. Mr. Wooten responded the Board has until the last of the month for their decision.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to table the decision on the MOU until the meeting on June 28th, with a second by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

A general discussion on which Counties have opted not to approve the MOU, and the repercussion if you do not, along with our County attorney reviewing the proposal. Ms. Sigmon told what the other DSS Directors have shared as their viewpoint on the MOU with the Board.

The DSS Director finished her update with asking the Board to consider part time employees in the Medicaid department, in which Vice Chair Brown spoke on the overwhelming evidence showing they do need help, whereas Chairman Walker mentioned the double caseloads the department is currently handling.

Recessed

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to recess at 12:56 p.m. until the June 28th Board Meeting, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Sena Allison

Clerk to the Board

David N. Walker

Chairman