

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – August 19, 2024**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, August 19, 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; Weyland Prebor, Senior Center Director, Amanda Finn, Trail Grants and Bobbie Sigmon; DSS Director

Call to Order

Chairman Walker called the meeting to order at 11:32 a.m.

Senior Center Update

Chairman Walker welcomed Weyland Prebor to give an update on a Fall Prevention Grant the Senior Center received. Mr. Prebor started with a presentation done by an intern that worked in the McDowell County Falls Prevention Coalition this summer. He highlighted demographics gathered in 2023, for the year 2022. The presentation showed the percentage of McDowell County 65 and older adult population was at 22%, which is 1 in 4 residents. He told he was focused on the 85 and older population who are at 3% currently and how the older population will grow exponentially over the next 20 years. Mr. Prebor told the characteristics of 65 and older in the County were 19% Veteran, 23% living alone and 14% less than high school education. Mr. Prebor told that 40% of this age group have 1 or more disabilities. He spoke on how McDowell ranks 4th out of 15 Western NC Counties for the 65 and older population, based on more people moving here to retire. Mr. Prebor went over several social and economic characteristics of the 65 plus population.

He led to a 5-year study done in McDowell County as falls being the leading cause of death for the 65 and over community from 2017-2021. Also falls were the leading cause of injury and injury hospitalization. His data shows McDowell County ranks 13th out of all 100 NC Counties for fall-related ED visits for 65 plus adults. Vice Chair Brown asked why we were 13th,

in which Mr. Prebor answered they do not know why, it could be socio economics and/or disabilities that so many of these adults are diagnosed with. Vice Chair Brown asked about if diet and exercise was a contributing factor as well, in which the Director said yes, diabetes and the health issues that go along with that diagnosis does add to falls.

Information was given by the director on services the County does not have for assistance as to reducing or aiding citizens to have less falls. He stated what they are seeking to do moving forward is to tackle how to lessen falls by having additional exercise classes at the senior center, and how there was a grant given that would help through computer technology, as well as simple home modifications of grab bars, rails, motion censored lights. He brought up how the House Appropriation Committee made cuts to various aging services that includes Falls Prevention Programs. Chairman Walker stated the Board was for prevention of falls 100% and he requested staff get a letter drafted to our US House Member and both Senate Members in support of Mr. Prebor's agency to keep that funding intact. He added it was important not to take money away from people who are older Americans who have paid their taxes and been good citizens needing assistance, who are suffering with limited incomes just to have Government give money to illegal immigrants.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to draft a letter for continued support to funding for falls, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Walker asked Mr. Prebor what was the daily average of people coming in to the Centers to use the facility and have meals, in which he answered for both locations (Marion and Old Fort) they average approximately 225 per day.

Mr. Prebor thanked the Board, and much appreciation was given to him, for his commitment to our seniors.

DSS Update

At this time, Chairman Walker changed the agenda schedule from Trail Grants being next to the DSS Update. Bobbie Sigmon started with an award the McDowell County DSS won on August 1st from the Social Services Institute for the Innovation Award. This award is for community engagement for the partnership with the Live like Megan Foundation. The Board had their picture taken with Ms. Sigmon, in which Chairman Walker gave congratulations to the hard work and dedication to all involved in the Live Like Megan Foundation to our community.

Ms. Sigmon informed the Board of their Back to School drive for donations, in partnership with the Live Like Megan Foundation, to give the supplies to the Foster and Kinship families. This event will be on August 24th from 11-2:00 p.m. at the Tom Johnson's Camping Pavilion and will include an obstacle course, face painting, door prizes, free hair cuts from Rootz Salon, hamburgers, hot dogs, chips and drinks. This will be the first event for DSS, for school supplies. She told that Rootz Salon would be giving a voucher for 1 free haircut a month for a year.

The director told of this month being Child Support Awareness Month for the state of N.C., and on the 21st of August, from 2-3:00 p.m. the child support office would do a Sweet Social, with raffle tickets sold to raise funds.

She presented MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) information that the State had sent and recognized McDowell County had passed all the data points, showing a comparison to the other counties. Ms. Sigmon went over how the MOU's data is gathered. She also highlighted being at 100% for seeing all of the DSS's foster children and have started contracting with another company to be able to see the foster children that are more than an hour away, which is approximately 20 kids.

Ms. Sigmon went over the screen in and out report, in which the data shows higher than the States average, with Chairman Walker interjected it is the Board's position to see more of this in order to have better documentation in each case. The director said they are in the process of doing more training on the screen in and out process.

She went over several of the chart assessments, highlighting: DSS currently has 86 children in care, verses 110 in January of 2023; falls with the adults that are in the DSS system; energy applications raising due to power increases by Duke Power and the allotment for each applicant being \$600 per year that is set by the State. Commissioner Allison asked how much funding was cut on the energy and if this happened due to the County having extra money that we returned back to the State, in which Ms. Sigmon said she was not sure but did not think so. She told in regards to the cold weather, she is planning on reaching out to local churches to ask for aid as far as heaters and supplies to assist people in need. Commissioner Greene cited he did not like how money is given for useless things and not for the mothers and fathers of our community.

Ms. Sigmon went over the audit that was just given on Food nutrition, the number of in person visits to DSS last month as 339, with 2900 incoming calls. She cited Medicaid applications submitted as increasingly higher than last year and the vacancies that are still open, within the department for jobs. Lastly, she presented a letter she prepared for the Board to review for submission to the MOU.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to approve the signing of the letter to the MOU, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Trail Grants

The Chairman introduced Amanda Finn who presented the Board with a Power Point presentation, showing several Trail updates. The slides displayed different areas in the County with detailed imagery, starting with Phases 1 -4 including Old Fort Fonta Flora Trail projects, the Curtis Creek Bridge and a Fishing Pier with the Trail to Greenlee Rd. The presentation showed having raised grants of \$1,153,000.00 thus far for Phases 1 and 2 with a list of how the budget was broken out. The next grants to be raised will be for Phases 3 and 4 totaling \$1,272,000.00, with that budget being broken out. Ms. Finn cited she would be speaking to the Board about the Great Trails State Plan which is a onetime single allocation General Assembly Grant, that was provided as a part of the Complete the Trails program funding. She explained this was an allocation of \$28 billion dollars by our local Legislators for the use of outdoor recreation in NC, having the maximum amount of the grant of \$500,000.00, with a required 50% match. She told this is not going to recur, and this is the largest grant for application in NC at this time. Ms. Finn requested approval by the Board to submit for the Grant, with the match required for acceptance. Chairman Walker asked how confident she was on receiving this grant, in which

she said they were lucky for McDowell County to have 2 shovel ready, viable projects that are scoring 98 and 99% out of 100 on the requirements. Although she cannot guarantee to receive the grant, as it has to be divided geographically to 3 regions of NC but with Western NC having the most trails and outdoor recreation in the entire State, she thinks we have a healthy shot. Ms. Finn acknowledged she has drafted a very strong application, in which Chairman Walker asked what the award date would be and Ms. Finn said January of 2025.

The Chairman asked Ms. Finn what the breakdown of the match would be. She gave the details as: Old Fort at \$88,000.00, McDowell TDA at \$100,000.00 and McDowell County's part at \$62,000.00, if they so choose to accept the terms. She told the amounts would be divided across 2 fiscal years, citing for the 2025 and 2026 term. The Chairman and Vice Chairman stated the Board supports the grant as long as the County has this in the budget. The County Manager spoke on the budget having approximately \$25,000.00 in trail initiative monies every year. Chairman Walker proposed that if the County budgeted \$25,000.00 next year and the same the year after, they could use some of the ARCA interest to make up the difference. Commissioner Allison asked what the balance of the ARCA interest was, in which Mr. Wooten said he would get back to the Board. Commissioner Greene spoke on how he determines how he votes as to what benefits the majority of citizens of McDowell County and to how many folks use our campgrounds, hotels, restaurants and trails to bring in revenue.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to accept the proposal based on what Mr. Wooten discovers is in the budget for ARCA interest, and presenting that to Board, with a second by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

David Walker, Chairman
Tony Brown, Vice Chairman
Chris Allison, Commissioner
Patrick Ellis, Commissioner
Lynn Greene, Commissioner



Ashley Wooten, County Manager
Sena Allison, Clerk to the Board
Donald Fred Coats, County Attorney

McDowell County

RESOLUTION IN APPROVAL AND CERTIFICATION OF MCDOWELL COUNTY'S APPLICATION FOR GREAT TRAILS STATE PROGRAM

WHEREAS, the Great Trails State Program is eligible to applicable agencies, including local governments; and

WHEREAS, the McDowell County Greenway Plan, which was adopted in 2012, provided for the extension of a greenway between Roby Conley Road and Resistoflex Road near Marion, NC; and

WHEREAS, this segment of greenway was eventually added to the NC Department of Transportation program as Project EB-5916; and

WHEREAS, approximately 6,864 linear feet extension of the greenway and bridge proposed for the grant will connect the Fonta Flora State Trail from Roby Conley Road to the Resistoflex Road; and

WHEREAS, McDowell County's Board of Commissioners understands the requirements if awarded the grant from the North Carolina Trails Committee including a 50% funding match to be supplied by previously acquired NCDOT Grant EB-5916 and completion of the project within a 3-year time frame; and

WHEREAS, the Great Trails State Program requires a resolution of support from the board of McDowell County for applicants;

NOW, THEREFORE, IT BE RESOLVED by the McDowell County board supports an application for a Great Trails State Program grant with a commitment to fund and implement the project as described in this application managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation and Recreation Resource Service.

ADOPTED: This 19th day of August 2024

Attest:

David N. Walker
Chairman

Sena Allison
Clerk to the Board

A general discussion on how every dollar spent on a trail generates revenue of \$1.00 to \$3.00 benefiting the County's return, along the health perks given to the community.

Judge Hunter spoke thanks to the Board for hiring Amanda Finn and the urgency to turn in the grant by September 3rd. He spoke on the updates for several projects.

Mr. Wooten addressed an allowance to the Board to approve an application for a project around Greenlee Park, to allow for any cost over-run or increases. This application does not have an appeal for an additional match.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to accept the application, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten cited one last request of the Board regarding Trails, which is for a letter of support for a study grant on how to extend the Thermal Belt Rail Trail from Gilkey into southern McDowell County, whereas there is no money from the County involved only the support of the Commissioners.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to sign the letter for the study grant, with a second by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Vice Chair Brown asked if there could be a notice sent to the active line of Norfolk Southern, stating in the event the line was to shut down, that line would be available to County for outdoor recreational purposes, whereas Mr. Wooten answered there had been a law passed that even lines that were shut down could be reactivated, but it could be a possibility for the County to acquire. Chairman Walker asked staff to draft a letter asking if Vice Chair Brown's suggestion could be an option for McDowell County.

At that time Commissioner Greene had to excuse himself from the Board Room Meeting.

Mr. Wooten appealed for a request made by Kitty Wilson, if the Board would proclaim September as National Recovery Month. He spoke on events throughout the month to bring this awareness.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to proclaim September National Recovery Month, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten commended the work Ms. Wilson does and mentioned in relation to her work, there will be decisions the Board will make around December on Opioid funding. Chairman Walker thanked Ms. Wilson for her dedication on substance abuse and the Board was very supportive to the recovery of anyone with addictions, whereas Ms. Wilson thanked the Board and invited everyone to join in the Recovery Walk on September 25, 2024 at the Greenway.

Administrative Items

Mr. Wooten talked of water line projects, bringing attention to the Board of 2 engineering contracts done by WithersRavenal. The first contract is on the West Marion Elementary line and the other for additional work in the Nebo area, interjecting that this would be covered by

State, Federal and School funds. He lastly mentioned East Park Drive and Randolph Rd will be two sections for lines to start next.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to approve the contracts subject to State and Federal approval, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to adjourn at 1:02 p.m., with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Sena Allison
Clerk to the Board

David N. Walker
Chairman