

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – May 20, 2024**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, May 20, 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; Ron Richardson, Old Fort Fire Chief; Dustin Burleson, Vaya Representative and Bobbie Sigmon; DSS Director

Call to Order

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

Old Fort Fire Department Request

Chairman Walker recognized Ron Richardson to speak his request to the Board. Mr. Richardson began with the shortage of Volunteer Fire personnel, due to other jobs the volunteers have taken, the commitment to time and resources and increased training requirements. He stated it has been difficult to schedule part time staff with no benefits that have other jobs to be present at. The Fire Chief stated in the past year they had 932 calls, with 40% of them being medical, this calendar year thru April they have had 344 calls, with part time staff covering the hours of 6:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. He stated they are at a place where they need to go full time with one person 24/7, accounting to 3 full-time staff. This calculates to approximately \$70,000.00 per person, with that amount including salary with benefits.

After several meetings, they have determined a fire tax increase would be required to fund the staff needed. The current rates are 0.06 cents inside the Town and 0.09 cents outside the Town. Mr. Richardson is proposing to the Board, 0.08 cents and 0.11 cents, which would provide approximately \$90,000.00 for the department. He spoke of the work and accolades the Old Fort FD has received over the years, and communicated the tax increase is not something they want to do, as they have been the last department to do away with all volunteer coverage, then relayed the vast area the FD has to protect in the Town of Old Fort.

Chairman Walker responded with thanks to his thoughtful presentation and remarked how all the McDowell County Fire Departments act diligently when they approach the Board for any needs they have, and are good stewards of their resources and of the citizens. The Chairman expressed his understanding of this request being a great need with the vast trails and growth Old Fort has acquired.

Commissioner Greene made a motion to accept the fire tax increase as presented, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Vaya Update

Chairman Walker invited Dustin Burlison to give updates with Vaya with a projector presentation of slides and data based on the past 12 months. He showed details on the NC Innovations Waiver for Medicaid persons needing in home care facility for intellectual or developmental disabilities that gives those people the ability to live in the community. Needed to qualify for the Waiver, is a NC Supports Intensity Scales Assessment which is taken through Vaya as they then place the slots. He went on to update Care Management Active Members, Community Hospital Inpatient Admissions, Emergency Department Admissions and readmissions. The County Manager pointed out that he is on the Vaya's Regional Board and expressed what a good job they do with the numbers and serving the communities needs.

DSS Update

Chairman Walker called Bobbie Sigmon to speak on updates with DSS, and she started with the yearly data collected from the State for each County in our Region (we are Region 2) and where McDowell County stands percentage wise. A general discussion on child support, the court cases involved and the goals the DSS have landed at for the month of April. Ms. Sigmon mentioned having money left over in the Energy Program in which the County let another County use some of the funds, leaving \$10,000.00, to give back to the State. Chairman Walker said he would like to get the word out where we use as much of the funds we are allocated by the State as possible for our citizens, in which Ms. Sigmon said she has spoken with the school system to spread the word on having this program available.

Chairman asked when the program would start again, whereas Ms. Sigmon stated July 1, 2024 for the cycle on air conditioning. A general discussion on the Foster Care caseloads per Foster Care case workers that they are averaging approximately 17 and this is too many cases for a single worker. The DSS Director attributed the high load to the present 11 vacancies within the department and 5 in the CPS (Child Protective Services) division. Chairman asked what DSS is doing to recruit employees, in which Ms. Sigmon answered she and the County's human resource director have sent letters to the colleges, she has personally visited the colleges and have had postings on social media with the County but have had no applications in the past month. Commissioner Greene asked if she had reached out to retirees to see if they would possibly want to work part time, in which Ms. Sigmon returned she could reach out to see a list of potential candidates, and stated if they had been retired more than 3 years, they would have to earn their certificates again. The County Manager and Chairman weighed in on utilizing the experience and expertise of retirees as a great resource to fill these positions. Commissioner Greene asked for the number of Foster Care families available in McDowell County for the past 4 years and how many children are currently in foster care, whereas Ms. Sigmon answered 93 to the latter question.

Commissioner Greene wants the data when Ms. Sigmon can present to him, on how many of the 93 are in foster families inside and outside of McDowell County. Commissioner Greene asked in reference to child support, for the number of people who went to jail last year due to not paying their child support whereas Ms. Sigmon stated she did not know if that is tracked in the system, whereas Commissioner Greene said he could obtain this from the court house. He then asked for the information on where the children are currently who tested positive and are under CPS, from the date submitted for November of 2023 and March of 2024. He also asked when there are supervised visits with birth parents, is there someone with the child at all times, whereas Ms. Sigmon answered the court determines whether it is family member or a DSS person to be present during visits and that it is on a case-by-case basis. She stated if the visit is at the DSS office, there is a DSS worker present. Lastly, Ms. Sigmon shared data the Program Manager put together on current case statistics with the Board.

Administrative Items

Chairman Walker recognized Ashley Wooten to address Administrative items. Mr. Wooten began with the Universal Stream Restoration Project contract which Resource Institute who has a contract with the County, helped secure grant funding from the State of 5 million dollars for the improvements at the Universal property with including erosion, placement of a culvert with other items to be restored, and is asking for the contract to be approved by the Board to begin the project.

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

Mr. Wooten went on to some project ordinance amendments:

HOME Consortium Amendment 1, Accessibility for Parks Amendment 1, HOME Consortium Amendment 2, N. Main Street Project Amendment 5, Nebo Waterline Project Amendment 2, ARPA Amendment 13, Hoppy Tom Hollow Amendment 2, Project Splice Amendment 1, Universal Emergency Stream Grant, East End Water Project

Mr. Wooten gave the following Budget Amendments:

Budget Amendments:

GF 34 - Allocate revenue for salaries and for health insurance

GF 35 - Transfer between line items for Board of Elections

GF 36 - Transfer between line items and appropriate donations for Emergency Services.

GF 37 - Allocates loan proceeds.

GF 38 - Transfers between line items in Finance.

GF 39 - Allocates interest income for repairs to a boiler and HVAC

GF 40 - Allocates reserves, grant funds, and donations for the Library.

GF 41 - Allocates interest income for Animal Services

GF 42 - Transfer between line items in Waste Collections

GF 43 Transfer between line items and appropriates reserved funds in Register of Deeds

GF 44 - Appropriate revenue for the Sheriff's Office

GF 45 - Appropriates revenue for the Tag Office

GF 46 - Appropriates revenue and transfers between line items in various departments.

GF 47 - Appropriate revenue in Parks and Recreation

GF 48 - Transfers between line items in various departments.

GF 49 - Transfers between line items and appropriates revenue in DSS

GF 50 - Transfers revenue and transfers between line items in Senior Center

ENT2 - Transfers between line items and allocates interest revenue in Waste Enterprise

NWENT - Appropriates revenue in the Nebo Water fund

911F2 - Transfers between line items in the 911 fund.

FD3 - Allocates estimated sales taxes to fire departments

SP3 - Amends to the School Project Fund

Commissioner Greene motioned to approve the Project Ordinances and the Budget Amendments as presented, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten spoke in regards to the storm on Saturday the 18th of May, in that the Library had flooding and some damage in certain areas that will be restored, leading to these spaces being temporarily closed for approximately 30 days along with a few other buildings that had water infiltration that are being addressed as well. He cited the City of Marion had some trees down, sink holes and other issues that are being assessed by them.

Commissioner Allison asked Mr. Wooten to reach out to NCDOT in regards to several backed up drains due to Saturday's storm.

Chairman Walker asked for the Budget Presentation date and time, in which the County Manager answered as Thursday (May 23rd) at 8:30 a.m.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Brown motioned to adjourn the meeting, with a second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the meeting adjourned at 12:21 p.m.

Attest:

Sena A. Allison
Clerk to the Board

David N. Walker
Chairman