

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – February 12, 2024**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, February 12, 2024, at 5:00 p.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; Lynn Greene; Patrick Ellis

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Sena A. Allison, Clerk to the Board; and Fred Coats, County Attorney

Call to Order

Chairman Walker called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. The Prayer was given by Commissioner Greene. The Pledge of Allegiance was given by Commissioner Ellis.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the January 8, 2024 Regular Session minutes; and the January 22, 2024 Regular Session minutes; Vice Chair Brown approved. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Allison made a motion to approve the Agenda, second by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Parks and Recreation Update

The Chairman recognized the Parks and Recreation Director Mr. Chad Marsh for an update on activities. Mr. Marsh spoke on a new program that is called the Challenger Basketball league, which is from the Challenger Division Sports program. This program gives young men and women the opportunity to participate in and play a sport that they may have not ever been able to do before.

Mr. Marsh stated that he had worked with Vice Chair Brown on the Youth Archery organization, in which the shooting range was highlighted in a National Shooting Magazine.

Mr. Marsh recognized a grant that they received for Bicycle Helmets for underprivileged children.

Mr. Marsh spoke on the programs for children to support firearm safety and P.E. teachers who have to buy supplies themselves for their school's activities.

Mr. Marsh highlighted the opening of Black Bear Park, in which Commissioner Greene was a big support. He continued with the Maple Leaf Accessible Recreation Project which is approximately two and a half years ahead of schedule, and was awarded a \$500,000.00 grant for the installation of a new playground, workout, and recreation facility.

Mr. Marsh pointed out they had set a milestone with the number registered for the Little League Program so far for this year, which is 785 plus (not counting the Challenger and Senior leagues). Chairman Walker asked where that puts us in the State and Mr. Marsh answered that we were 3rd last year, and he will know more as registration continues. Vice Chair Brown recognized all the hard work Mr. Marsh and his staff have done for the County's youth.

The County Manager expressed to the board the desire to improve the Parks Plan which included a conversation with the Foothills Regional Commission in which they are prepared to help out. Mr. Wooten asked the Board if they would like to get the cost proposal from Foothills to be brought back to the Board.

Commissioner Greene approved with an Initiate the Parks plan. This was seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Walker asked Mr. Marsh about the scoreboards in some of the parks not working, Mr. Marsh commented that last year the County replaced 3 scoreboards. A general discussion followed on what parks had issues with internal parts of their scoreboards. Commissioner Ellis made a motion to purchase a new scoreboard for Lindley Park, not to exceed \$4200.00. Vice Chair Brown stated to have the County Manager look at pricing on four scoreboards that Mr. Marsh had stated have internal problems. Commissioner Ellis retracted his earlier motion and agreed to have Mr. Wooten look into the cost of the four scoreboards needed.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to look at the funding available for the project, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Tax Collector Items

Chairman Walker recognized Linda Onufrey the County Tax Collector for an update. Ms. Onufrey requested authorization of North Carolina General Statute 105-369 to advertise the 2023 Unpaid Real Property Tax Bills for the County and District. This balance Ms. Onufrey presented the Board as of January 31st, 2024 is \$2,412,626.78.

Ms. Onufrey stated she received a quote to publish the listings from *The McDowell News* of \$4,649.40 and recommended having this published on Tuesday, March 19, 2024. Ms. Onufrey stated that she sent out notices that state a 30-day term to pay whereby if taxes are paid by February 29, 2024, they will not be advertised.

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

EMS System Update

Chairman Walker recognized William Kehler the Director, McDowell County Emergency Services for an update on the EMS System. Mr. Kehler discussed the EMS wait times on transfers to Mission Hospital in Asheville. Mr. Kehler asserted that McDowell County operates 4 Stations, 24/7 and 365 days which are located on US 221N, off of US 221S, Nebo, and Old Fort with at least one ambulance assigned to each station, staffed with two paramedics and one EMS Supervisor assigned to a paramedic-equipped SUV that oversees EMS operations 24/7.

Mr. Kehler added that the Peak truck runs from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm seven days a week.

A general discussion was had on the update for wait times at Mission Hospital in Asheville and the protocol for transporting patients to facilities that are by request or by the care the patient requires. Commissioner Greene commended the achievements of the Director and staff on how they have been cited several times as being the best in the State

Chairman Walker stated three words to describe the EMS operations here in McDowell; Data, Driven, and Decisions, with having the top care anyone could have provided.

Old Business

Building Projects

The County Manager provided an update on Building Projects, naming the DSS Building and the Little Architect Firm has prepared a preliminary plan to be presented to the Board, which will help start with the pursuit of funding.

The County Manager stated the pre-bid on the Recreation Center will open on February 27, 2024, and moved to the Animal Shelter to have preliminary planning on a new site, wrapping up some Geotechnical work to be able to move forward to fundraising for a new facility.

Water Projects

Mr. Wooten gave an update on Water System Projects, starting with Nebo, with work on Phase 1, which comprises NC 126, Wildlife Road, Lonesome Pine Drive (line complete), Jack Corpening Road, Sunny Acres, and Bentwood Drive. Mr. Wooten stated that Hoppy Tom Hollow has been permitted and is ready for a bid, there is a grant to pay for the project, which needs to be approved.

RESOLUTION BY GOVERNING BODY OF APPLICANT

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Clean Water Revolving Loan and Grant Act of 1987 has authorized the making of loans and grants to aid eligible units of government in financing the cost of construction of wastewater treatment works, wastewater collection systems, and water supply systems, water conservation projects, and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality has offered a State Grant in the amount of \$815,437 for the construction of the Hoppy Tom Road Water Project and

WHEREAS, McDowell County intends to construct said project in accordance with the approved plans and specifications.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF MCDOWELL COUNTY:

- That McDowell County does hereby accept the grant offer of \$815,437.
- That the Board of Commissioners does hereby give assurance to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality that all items specified in the grant offer, Section II - Assurances will be adhered to.
- That Ashley R. Wooten, County Manager and successors so titled, is hereby authorized and directed to furnish such information as the appropriate State agency may request in connection with such application or the project; to make the assurances as contained above; and to execute such other documents as may be required in connection with the application.
- That McDowell County has substantially complied or will substantially comply with all Federal, State and local laws, rules, regulations, and ordinances applicable to the project and to Federal and State grants and loans pertaining thereto.

Adopted this the 12th of February at Marion, North Carolina.

Mr. Wooten at that time asked the Board for approval of the authorizing resolution, which Commissioner Allison made a motion to approve, second by Commissioner Brown. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

The County Manager and the Board had a general discussion on grants and then on a State Budget that has been granted of \$3.88 million to McDowell County to extend water around the community near West Marion Elementary. Mr. Wooten commented that the letter has not yet been received, he was told it went out Parcel on February 6th but has not yet been received.

Commissioner Allison made a motion to have staff follow up on the letter, second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Broadband Update

Mr. Wooten moved to a Broadband Update in which staff has been working on the initial application steps for submission of a Completing Access to Broadband (CAB) grant. He noted Charter Spectrum and Frontier have shown interest in applying for the (CAB) grants. Mr. Wooten mentioned after the CAB funds have been awarded, another State-level program called Stop Gap will be available and staff to meet with the Foothills Regional Commission for assistance on the Broadband Equity Access Development BEAD program. Chairman Walker asked what percentage of homes are not served. Mr. Wooten said approximately 15% and the goal is to have 100%. Vice Chair Brown stated that he would like to remind the public the Board set aside \$1,000,000.00 on this project.

New Business

Universal Building Lease

Mr. Wooten requested the lease extension for one of the spaces in the Universal Building, owned by the County since 2012 and is leased by private companies whose revenues go into the property for maintenance to sustain it. A 40,000 sq. ft area of the building is leased by Auria Solutions who have requested an extension on their lease with a proposed lease rate of \$1.85 a square foot, over the current \$1.80 a square foot.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the extension, with the increase of square footage cost, second by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.
Telecommunications Tower Ordinance

Mr. Wooten spoke on the Telecommunication Tower Ordinance Revision and commented this is the first reading on this matter, and no action in this meeting other than to have a hearing next month. Chairman Walker asked the Board and the census was everyone agreed.

Budget Update

Mr. Wooten provided a Budget update mentioning the property tax collection report shows a 93.78% collection rate through the end of November, citing there is one project budget ordinance amendment to the American Rescue Plan which is Amendment 11, and one project budget ordinance for the 2023 Foothills NC Home Consortium Program. Mr. Wooten shows the following budget amendments.

GF 20 - Appropriates donations at the Animal Shelter

GF 21 - Appropriates reimbursement and grant revenue in Emergency Services

GF 22 - Appropriate reimbursement for City and Town Elections for the Board of Elections

GF 23 -Appropriations inmate housing revenue for a vehicle purchase in the Sheriff's Office

GF 24 -Appropriates ARPA interest for the repairs to the City of Marion brush truck

Commissioner Greene motioned to approve the budget amendments, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Administrative Items

The County Manager moved to Administrative Items, mentioning it was noticed by the DSS Director the coding posted for a CSST Staff member vacancy was incorrect. This position requires an Associate Degree, thus an increase to the pay, he asked for an approval from the Board to upgrade to the correct code.

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

Mr. Wooten asked in regards to EMS write offs: to allow for the yearly adjustment increase of fees for the EMS Transport Rate based on Medicare rate and asked also that the fee would be automatic each year, to follow what the Medicare rates are adjusted to.

Mr. Wooten's next item was in reference to the Home Consortium which is the Multi County and Multi Municipality agreement we have as a Partnership. This is Federal funding being brought into the County for housing upgrades and assistance that has to be approved every year.

The County Manager presented a request for the approval of financing terms to undertake a project for the purchase of (1) Ford Ambulance, two (2) DSS Vehicles; Chevrolet Equinox and one (1) Recreation vehicle: A Ford F150.

The County Manager mentioned the Trains and Trails Festival Committee has asked for a contribution of \$4000.00 for the June 1, 2024 Event.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to accept all the Administrative items, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Board Appointments

Mr. Wooten asked for a one-month extension to take vacancy applications, due to the Clerk of Board change.

Vice Chair Brown made a motion to approve, second by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Tax Matters

The County Manager had a general discussion on the Tax Matters refunds, rebills and releases.

The Board reviewed, Commissioner Greene made a motion to accept the Tax Matters, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Commissioners/Staff Reports

The County Manager reminded the Board they are back on regular schedule for next week's meeting.

Citizen Comment

Chris Price spoke on Heritage and Legacy

Closed Session

Commissioner Ellis motioned to go into closed session to discuss personnel matters as permitted by NC General Statutes 143-318311 (a) (6), second by Vice Chair Brown. By a vote of 5-0 the closed session began at 6:18 p.m.

Return to Open Session

Commissioner Ellis motioned to return to open session at 6:46 p.m., second by Vice Chair Brown closed session 143-318.11 (a) (6). By a vote of 5-0 the motion was approved.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Brown motioned to adjourn, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion was approved to adjourn at 6:46 p.m.

Attest:

Sena A. Allison
Clerk to the Board

David N. Walker
Chairman