

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – September 8, 2025**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, September 8, 2025, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

Members Present

Chairman, Tony Brown; Vice-Chair, Lynn Greene; Patrick Ellis, Trisha Garner, and David Walker

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board; Fred Coats, County Attorney; William Kehler, ES Director; Marlan Brinkley, Library Director; Candice Workman, McDowell County Public Library History Room; Aikman Kazee, Parks and Recreation Director; Ron Harmon, Deputy County Manager for Community Development

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. Commissioner Ellis led the group in prayer. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Garner.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the August 11th and August 18th Regular Session Minutes and the August 25th Special Session Minutes, with a second by Vice-chair Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the agenda, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Parks and Recreation Programming Update

Aikman Kazee gave a Parks and Recreation update and began with a general update.

General Update:

- Hosted Free Physical Day on 23 August with 113 children receiving a free physical thanks to Marion Medical Clinic.
- Pavilion at Hemphill Park was completed, offering a permanent shade structure for a park that severely lacked one.
- Youth Football registration ended with 409 participants. League grew 21% in 2024.
- Programs staff will begin our Have A Ball Initiative this week at the Elementary Schools.
- Pool Season ended with over 11,000 patrons served during the summer.
- Black Bear Campground and Park has surpassed 2024's gross revenue by over \$9,300, with August 2025 being the highest revenue month since opening.
- McDowell County Shooting Range hosted their annual Train Up A Child with 12 participants. Staff will host "Never Too Late To Learn" on 9 September.
- Bleachers in the Recreation Center Gym began installation today.

Mr. Kazee presented the first proposal to the board. Mr. Kazee requested expansion of the youth basketball league to add an instructional league for children aged four. The division will focus on teaching children the fundamentals of the game of basketball. Games would be played primarily on Saturdays throughout the season. No score will be kept, and basic violations will not be called (such as double dribble and traveling). The goal of the league is to provide children with the opportunity to learn the game of basketball before competing in the termite division (5-6). You must turn four as of Aug 31, 2025, to participate. They will also expand cheerleading to four. The McDowell County Shooting Range will begin offering NRA-certified courses to the public. Patrons at the Range have consistently requested classes to be offered at the Range beyond our highly successful "Train Up A Child" and "Never Too Late To Learn!" offerings.

- Staff already certified as NRA instructors
- Beginner Classes - \$150 | Advanced Classes - \$200
- 8 hour classes | Tuesdays | Frequency Based on Demand
- Examples of classes include - NRA Pistol Beginner & Advanced, NRA Rifle Beginner

Chairman Brown expressed his gratitude for the Parks and Rec Department and the proposed classes offered. Vice-chair Greene made a motion to approve the programs as presented, with a second from Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed. Commissioner Garner expressed her appreciation for the day programs and all of their hard work. Outside of the organized sports, there is a focus on all children having access to participate in them.

Library One Day Wonder Exhibit

Marlan Brinkley introduced Candice Workman to give an update on a special program coming to Old Fort. Ms. Workman gave an overview of the One Day Wonder Exhibit with the original NC Constitution and a letter from John Adams. The event will be free and open to the public on September 17th, 2025, from 10 am to 5 pm at the Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort, NC.

Helene Update

Will Kehler covered the monthly update and wanted to recognize Deputy Adrienne Jones for her hard work. The day marked day 349 of the Emergency Operations Work. The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) will be administered through the County's Soil and Water Office (a federal program, but they're the local point of contact). Reimbursements for the NC Private Road and Bridge Program will be open September 1, 2025. Residents who repaired their driveway after Helene can apply for 50% reimbursement. VOAD will continue to meet biweekly.

Personal Property:

- 15.5% of the Helene debris from McDowell County
- Total Debris Removed: 1,365,282
- Parcels Requested: 1,441
- Parcels vetted: 1,326
- Parcels Contracted: 1,294
- Parcels in Progress: 41
- Parcels Complete: 1,104
- Cubic Yards Cleared: 102,730
- Cubic Yards Estimated: 72,000

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP):

- Program administered through McDowell County Soil & Water Office
- EWP is designed for the installation of recovery measures. Activities include providing financial and technical assistance to:
 - Remove debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges
 - Reshape and protect eroded banks
 - Correct damaged drainage facilities
 - Establish cover on critically eroding lands
 - Repair levees and structures and
 - Repair conservation practices.
- Citizens can submit an online interest form by visiting:
 - mcdowellgov.com/helene

Emergency Housing Repairs & Rebuilds:

- Completed Projects: 478
- Pending Projects: 29
- Rebuilds: 26

Hazard Mitigation Program:

- Acquisition: 35
- Elevation: 21
- Generator Projects: 17
- Landslide: 12

- Wildfire Mitigation: 0

FEMA Reimbursement Update:

- Total of 15 applications
- 7 have been obligated, totaling \$2,116,913

Priorities Next 30 Days:

- Continue addressing the critical needs of citizens.
- Debris Operations
- Coordination with NCEM on SMART Program
- PPDR
- City Water Intakes / Lake Tahoma Debris Removal
- Housing Repairs
- Complete additional housing repairs via VOAD and NGOs
- Hazard Mitigation
- FEMA Reimbursement Applications (15)
- Continue to implement long-term recovery strategies.

Commissioner Walker asked if the Forest Service had a plan in place to prevent the spread of forest fires due to downed trees. Mr. Kehler said he cannot speak specifically about the forest services, but he is not aware of any program available to private residences.

On 9/27/25, there will be a resilience and reflection ceremony at Old Fort Elementary. Chairman Brown and Commissioner Walker expressed their appreciation for Mr. Kehler's hard work.

RV/Campground Ordinance First Reading

Ron Harmon, Deputy County Manager for Community Development, presented the draft RV Campground Ordinance. There is a Mobile Home Park Ordinance that has been in effect since 1997. Sixteen months ago, the Planning Board was asked to determine if regulations were needed for RV parks, campgrounds, etc. The main priority was increasing safety (emergency vehicle access, structure spacing in the event of fires, evacuation plans submitted to Emergency Services, and numbered lots for clear emergency response).

Commissioner Ellis asked about penalties and fees and when they would be applicable. Mr. Harmon said the fee is for adding above what you've been approved for. Chairman Brown asked Mr. Harmon to check on the penalty fee and raise the fee. Mr. Harmon relayed that he would check on this, but believes it is statutorily set at \$50. Vice-chairman Greene asked about existing parks, and Mr. Harmon stated that existing parks are grandfathered in until you begin infilling, and then it becomes an issue. Commissioner Ellis proposed that the public hearing be held in November, and Commissioner Walker seconded it. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Jacktown Area Property Matter

Mr. Wooten updated the board on the Jacktown area property matter. The Abandon Mobile Home Ordinance is complaint-driven, and staff reviews complaints as they are received. Mr. Wooten stated that there are health and safety concerns when property is not maintained and considered abandoned. Complaints have been received about property located in the

Jacktown area, and the property is considered abandoned. The property owners have been served, and violations of the ordinance are to be cleaned up by 9/30/25. Commissioner Walker made a motion that staff proceed with whatever steps are necessary to remediate the property if the property violations are not corrected by the deadline (9/30/25), with a second by Vice-Chair Greene. By a motion of 5-0, the motion passed.

Water System Projects

Mr. Wooten gave an update on the East End Project. The East End Project around NC 126 and Marion Lake Club has been started. Nebo Phase 2A and 2B are starting to wrap up, however, there are some issues with Phase 3. The plans have been approved by NCDEQ, but NCDOT requires encroachment agreements for the building of waterlines. Encroachment agreements that are not Helene-related have been farmed out to Raleigh due to the high volume from Helene damage and this is causing delays. The District Engineer has made several attempts to. Nebo's small project is taking time to complete the paperwork.

The West Marion Elementary project has had an engineering staff change. They are completing an environmental document that needs to be completed because of federal funding involvement. Designs for the booster station are being created, and a contract amendment will be available next week for board review. The grant application is underway to provide funding for the completion of the loop from Marlor Road to Zion Hill. Commissioner Ellis asked about a timeline for breaking ground. Mr. Wooten stated that the 60% plans are available now, and the engineer transition is over; they should move faster towards this goal.

Charlotte Water Interbasin Transfer Update

Mr. Wooten stated that there has been little movement regarding the Interbasin Transfer request from Charlotte Water to move water from the Catawba River basin to the Rocky River basin. The general assembly passed House Bill 850, which imposed a moratorium on Interbasin Transfers until 2027, and they issued a study on IBTs that will be completed by UNCC. There is no movement now, but conversations are being discussed.

County Property Update

Mr. Wooten gave an overview of property matters. The two items being discussed are in the services building. Currently at the Services Building, the air system is designed to run all the time and baseboard heat is used. Discussion surrounding state funding for the renovation of the building and the HVAC system is the priority to address. Replacement of the air handling unit (\$222,000), replacement of the chiller (\$284,000), replacement of the damper controls (\$154,000), and leaving existing duct work have been discussed. \$300,000 of state funds is available. Mr. Wooten wants to talk to Mr. Riddle for additional thoughts and recommendations for this project.

The DSS property retaining wall has a bit of a lean in the wall. An engineer looked at the wall and agreed that something needed to be done. Two options are feasible for this situation. Either soil nailing or the removal of the existing wall and reconstruction of the new one (\$200,000). Commissioner Ellis asked about discussing this issue with the neighbor because fixing this issue would mean being on their property partially. Mr. Wooten will discuss this with the neighbor and have feedback by the next nightly meeting.

Animal Services Update

Mr. Wooten presented two items under the animal shelter discussion. They've evaluated several pieces of property and presented an option on Spaulding Road and another near the shooting range. The Spaulding Road site has been owned by the County since the early 80s, and utility access is available for water and sewer. Vice-chair Greene asked if the County owned the property leading up to the shooting range, and Mr. Wooten said the County owns it after Muddy Creek. Mr. Wooten stated there is concern related to high water events for the property near the shooting range. Commissioner Walker requested that they zero in on a site for the animal control building. Commissioner Walker asked if they could expand at the current site, and Mr. Wooten relayed that it would be limited expansion. Commissioner Walker asked for Mr. Wooten's recommendation and added that state inspections have prompted prioritization. Mr. Wooten stated that it is a County's responsibility to provide animal control services, and there is a need for a new building. There have been conversations and discussions about options for DSS building and the struggle to prioritize buildings because there is a need for many. Mr. Wooten stated that Burke County financed and built the EMS Building and the Animal Shelter at the same time. The recommendation would be to bundle several projects together. Commissioner Ellis asked about the ranked list from previous months and expressed the need to discuss funding opportunities with state legislation. Commissioner Walker made a motion for Mr. Wooten to bring back a bundle recommendation by the November meeting, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten stated that the rotary grant is available for funding for a low-income spay and neuter program. Vice-chair Greene made a motion to authorize applying for this grant, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Update

Mr. Wooten presented the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Update. There is a Project Budget Ordinance request for approval that will be for Asset, Inventory, and Assessment along with budget amendments (GF5-8 and SP2).

GF 5 - Allocates revenue, fund balance, and transfers between line items for Emergency Services.

GF 6 - Allocates revenue and fund balance for the Sheriff's Office.

GF 7 - Allocates revenue for Transit equipment.

GF 8 - Transfers between line items for the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council.

SP 2 - Amends the School Project Fund for various school renovation projects and property purchases.

Vice-chair Greene made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Administrative Items

Mr. Wooten presented EMS non-collectable write-offs of \$52,208.88, Nebo Water Adjustments of \$125 and the need for a data-breach policy for the grant the Sheriff's Department is applying for. Commissioner Ellis asked if it is required by statute for these to be written off after ten years and if there were issues putting liens on property. Mr. Wooten stated that you cannot attach liens for EMS bills, but you can treat it like a tax debt otherwise. The County has a billing company, EMS MC, that does the primary collection, a collection company tries to collect after EMS MC, and finally staff of the County tries to collect prior to the write-offs being brought before the board. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve as presented, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Committee Appointments

The Clerk to the Board stated that this was a first reading for the application received for Foothills Workforce Development by Mark Weber. Vice-chair Greene made a motion to approve the appointment application, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

There is a second reading for the two open seats on the McDowell Economic Development Board. No applications have been received yet, but Mr. Harold Walker and Mr. Jeffery Judd have expressed interest in remaining on the board. The board needs to appoint a member to the Child Fatality Prevention Team. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve Mr. Walker and Mr. Judd to the McDowell Economic Development Board and to appoint Commissioner Garner to serve on the Child Fatality Prevention Team. This motion is seconded by Commissioner Ellis and by a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Property Tax Matters

Mr. Wooten presented the tax matters for the month of August and additional 10-year write-offs presented by the County's tax collector. Vice-chair Greene made a motion to approve as presented, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Releases over \$100.00:	\$1409.06
Releases under \$100.00:	\$460.11
Refunds:	\$2851.99
Discoveries:	\$442.01

Citizen Comment

Ron Sinclair commented on Concerns for senior tax matters. Teri Stahari commented on renewable energy options for the courthouse.

Closed Session [NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(6)]

Commissioner Walker made a motion to go into closed session at 6:27 pm, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. Commissioner Ellis made a motion to come out of closed session at 7:47 pm, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 7:48 p.m., with a second by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Madalyn Robinson
Clerk to the Board

Tony Brown
Chairman