

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF McDOWELL
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION – MARCH 30, 2009**

ASSEMBLY

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in special session at 11:30 A.M. on March 30, 2009, in the Commissioners' Board Room, the usual place of meeting.

MEMBERS PRESENT

David N. Walker, Barry E. McPeters, Dean Buff, Andrew K. Webb, and Michael Lavender

OTHERS PRESENT

Charles R. Abernathy, County Manager; Ashley Wooten, Assistant to the County Manager and Mike Conley, Reporter for THE McDOWELL NEWS; Keith Renfro, Tax Assessor; Tom Ebert and Ron McCarthy, RSM Appraisal Service

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Walker who recognized Keith Renfro. Mr. Renfro stated that the purpose of the meeting was to consider a proposal from RS&M Appraisal service. He introduced Tom Ebert and Ron McCarthy of the firm to describe their work history and the proposal for McDowell County.

Mr. Ebert introduced himself to the Board, noting that he had been working on property revaluations since 1977. He listed several counties including Polk, Union, and Anson that he was currently assisting in their revaluation process. He said he has worked on approximately sixty revaluations in his career.

Mr. Ebert noted that McDowell County is not unique in the reevaluation process. He said while each county has different situations, all must follow the statutes when it comes to the revaluation process. He said the process to get to the final values involves as many as fifteen steps.

Mr. Ebert stated that he and Mr. McCarthy specialize in assisting smaller counties that do not have large enough staffs to handle the entire revaluation process. He said their primary function would be to concentrate on the industrial and commercial properties, while providing assistance with residential. The final product of their work would be a schedule of values.

Mr. McCarthy introduced himself. He said that he has been working in the field since 1971. He stated that he has worked in several counties in the region, including Burke, Rutherford, Alexander, and Watauga. He has worked previously as the Chief Appraiser in Lincoln County.

After hearing from Mr. Ebert and Mr. McCarthy, Chairman Walker asked the Board if there were any questions about the proposal or the company.

Commissioner Lavender asked who the primary contact would be. Mr. Ebert said he would be the primary coordinator of the project between him and the county. Mr. Lavender asked where their toughest revaluation was. Mr. Ebert said he had not worked in that many mountain counties, but had had difficult situations in the past. Mr. McCarthy noted an issue in Moore County in 1988 and Chatham County this year. He noted that the appeal process handles most of the problems taxpayers have. He said the economy has had a large impact on much of the issues they have encountered recently. Mr. Ebert said he had monitored problems in other counties in relation to recent development/subdivisions. He said he knew there would be problems that occur in the process, but they will work through them.

Commissioner Buff asked who controlled RS&M. Mr. McCarthy said he owns the company and will work with Mr. Ebert. Commissioner Webb asked how familiar they were with the Machinery Act and North Carolina counties. Mr. Ebert said he primarily works in NC though he lives in Spartanburg County, SC. Mr. McCarthy said he has worked extensively for rural counties in North Carolina.

Commissioner Webb said that the citizens will be interested in the backgrounds of the appraisers. Mr. Ebert said that the revaluation process will be lead by in house staff working in consultation with Mr. Ebert and Mr. McCarthy. Commissioner Webb confirmed with Mr. Renfro that the in house staff will primarily handle residential properties.

The County Manager asked if they would handle the schedule of values. Mr. Ebert confirmed that would be the case. Commissioner Lavender asked if the price was inclusive of all the work. Mr. McCarthy said that in prior projects they were often under budget.

Chairman Walker asked if there were any pending suits. They both said they did not have ongoing litigation. Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Ebert said they both carry Errors and Omissions Insurance, as well as any other required coverage.

Vice Chairman McPeters asked what the process would be for notifying residents of the process. Mr. McCarthy said that the county will handle much of the public notification. Mr. Abernathy asked if there was a goal of how many would be appealed. Mr. McCarthy said historically about 10% appeal.

Commissioner Webb asked if there are counties where subdivisions have increased exponentially like had occurred recently in McDowell County. Mr. McCarthy mentioned his experience in Chatham County where areas around Cary and Chapel Hill have grown.

Mr. Ebert noted his experience in Union County where growth has been up and down. Polk County was also a good example of where there had been rampant subdivision of land.

Mr. Abernathy said he has discussed the process with Mr. Renfro and has reviewed the proposal from RS&M. He suggested to the Board that if they were comfortable with the proposal, they could move forward and have a contract drafted for final approval or approve the proposal and have staff approve a contract.

Mr. Ebert said he felt the proposal was fair and he felt the team they had put together was qualified to handle the job for the county.

Chairman Walker said he liked the approach of the proposal, and felt that it was fair. He asked each commissioner give input on the proposal.

Commissioner Lavender asked if staff approved of the company. Mr. Renfro and Mr. Abernathy both approved of the company and their proposal. Commissioner Buff said that working through the Board of Equalization and Review will be a good way to work through any issues that may arise during the revaluation process.

Chairman Walker asked Mr. Renfro for a comparison of bids for other companies. He also asked about temporary staff that would be hired. Mr. Abernathy noted that the staff would be hired as temporary county employees, not employees of RS&M.

Mr. Renfro noted there were two other proposals. The first was from Robert Bonti of Prestige Tax Revaluation Consultants. His proposal was for \$357,589. He withdrew due to health problems. The other proposal was from Wampler-Eanes. Their proposal was for seven hundred dollars a day. Based on the number of predicted days of service, their proposal would equal \$220,000.

Mr. Renfro said he would hire two temporary employees for about 18 months to cover the work. Commissioner Webb asked Mr. Renfro how comfortable he was with the current hardware and software system. Mr. Renfro noted that Art Uphold and Melissa Nealley will work on the process as well as the two temporary employees. He will oversee the project in coordination with Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Ebert.

Commissioner Lavender made a motion to contract with Mr. Ebert and Mr. McCarthy for the 2011 revaluation and to hire any necessary temporary staff. He asked that the County Attorney review the contract before its execution. Vice Chairman McPeters seconded and the vote was unanimous to approve.

BRIDGE PROGRAM DISCUSSION

Commissioner Buff asked to allow a discussion of one additional item. Commissioner Lavender motioned and Vice Chairman McPeters seconded the motion to allow additional discussion. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Buff said the issue he wished to discuss was the Building, Rehabilitating, Instructing, Developing, Growing, Employing (BRIDGE) Program. He said he had spoken to several concerned citizens, including County Forester John Reese, about the potential loss of the program. Mr. Reese told Commissioner Buff that losing the program would be devastating due to the help it provides in emergencies such as wildfires. Commissioner Buff requested that the county send a letter to the governor and the legislature voicing support for the program.

The County Manager noted that volunteer firefighters would be very challenged as well with the loss of the program. Chairman Walker asked that county staff draft a letter to the legislature and the governor.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to transact at this time, upon motion by Commissioner Webb and a second by Commissioner Lavender, the meeting was adjourned.

DAVID N. WALKER, CHAIRMAN

ASHLEY R. WOOTEN
DEPUTY CLERK TO THE BOARD