

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – AUGUST 10, 2020**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, August 10, 2020, at 5:00 p.m., at the Universal Conference Room, 634 College Drive, Marion, North Carolina.

Members Present

David N. Walker, Chair; Tony Brown, Vice-Chair; Barry McPeters; Brenda Vaughn

Members Absent

Lynn Greene

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Cheryl Mitchell, Clerk to the Board

Call to Order

Chairman Walker called the meeting to order. The invocation was given by Commissioner McPeters, followed by the pledge of allegiance, led by Vice Chairman Brown.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner McPeters made a motion, second by Commissioner Vaughn, to approve the July 13, 2020 Regular Session; July 20, 2020 Regular Session; and July 27 Special Session minutes. By a vote of 4-0, the motion carried.

Approval of Agenda

Chairman Walker called for any additions or deletions to the agenda.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, second by Vice Chairman Brown. By a vote of 4-0, the motion carried.

COVID-19 Update

Mr. William Kehler, Emergency Services Director, gave an update on the COVID-19 response:

- Day 148 of EOC activation; 9,339 tested; 8,133 negative; 649 positive; 557 pending; 17 deaths
- 7.4% positive percentage of total tested; 6.6% hospitalization
- sharp increase in individuals 65 years and over that are positive; numbers are not related to long term care facilities-increase due to community spread
- steady increase in 25-49 years old; decline in 0-17 years old and 18-24 years old
- one month after declaring outbreak at Deer Park facility 33 patients have tested positive; 3 remain hospitalized; 10 deaths; 26 staff have tested positive; 6 staff members are PUI for COVID like symptoms
- a coordination call is held every morning at the facility; and EOC/EM Manager has been on site 7 days a week to help; decontamination tents have been set up for employees to change clothing

before going home; tents for break areas; Avery Co loaned a shower trailer with a bathroom/shower trailer combo; weekly testing for staff and patients

- there are 700 patients at other long term care facilities in the county that EM is continuing to coordinate needs
- school plans have been set up; added personnel to COVID hotline in anticipation of parents calls
- transporting more COVID patients now doing everything possible to keep paramedics safe
- Community Care paramedics are assisting at the testing sites
- noted there was an earthquake this past Sunday; second strongest in NC history at 5.1; no damages were reported
- forecast prediction is for a busy hurricane season
- \$465,000 in FEMA charges have been accumulated thus far

Vice Chairman Brown appreciates the work of the Emergency Services and wishes everyone would wear mask if for no other reason than for the elderly and concern for others to wear a mask.

Mr. Kehler added the effect of the virus on the senior citizen population is heartbreaking.

Tax Collector Items

Ms. Linda Onufrey presented the 2019-2020 fiscal year tax settlement for 2019 McDowell County property taxes and district taxes. She reported the overall collection rate of 99.11% represented the collection rate for real and personal property. The collection rate placed McDowell County in the top 15 across the state. Ms. Onufrey also praised her staff for their hard work and dedication, especially since this was a challenging year with dealing with the COVID virus, and adding two new employees.

She also presented the Order of Collection for approval of authorizing the collection of the tax bills, and presented a list of the delinquent taxes owed for real property and personal property.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion to approve the Order of Collection, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Ms. Onufrey also requested she be reappointed as Tax Collector for McDowell County pursuant to NCGS 105-349. The reappointment would be for a four year term.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion to reappoint Linda Onufrey as Tax Collector, second by Vice Chairman Brown. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Golden Leaf Grant Update

Mr. Chuck Abernathy noted the county unemployment rate of 6.9% is lower than the connecting counties to McDowell. It is also one percent lower than the state average.

Mr. Abernathy then gave an overview of a Golden Leaf Community-Based Grant Initiative project that would develop the county and city property on College Drive. The grant opportunity is available to the twelve counties in the NW Prosperity Zone. The grant is capped at \$1.5 million per county, and the County Manager is the designated person to decide which projects will be submitted from McDowell.

Mr. Abernathy noted there is currently a \$600,000 ARC grant that will construct the road overlooking the pond and partially construct the second road south of College Drive. He presented a project for grading shovel ready sites and possibly finishing the second road. Developing shovel ready sites and buildings would be beneficial to the county since there are limited sites in the County.

The proposal was to complete the second road and grade a total of four sites; one being the property overlooking the pond; grade two small sites that could be used by the College or a business; then grade the fourth site for construction of a shell building by the private sector. The property is owned by the County, City of Marion and McDowell Tech Community College.

Mr. Wooten noted roads and sites shovel ready would be a good fit for this type of grant.

Mr. Jeff Judd, Economic Development Commission Chair, added this has been in discussion for many years and the MEDA Board supports the project.

Vice Chairman Brown made a motion to submit a request for full amount of \$1.5 million, second by Commissioner Vaughn. Discussion followed on the possibility of additional projects that might also be submitted, so the full amount might not be available. Suggestion made if there were no other competitive applications, preference would be submitting for the maximum amount.

Vice Chairman Brown amended his motion to submit request ranging from \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million, and the full amount of \$1.5 million if there were no other request, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Economic Development Public Hearing

Chairman Walker declared the Board in public hearing setting at 5:53pm pursuant to NCGS G.S. 158-7.1.

Mr. Abernathy noted a company was looking to relocate from the West Coast and employ 70 people within five years. The company has been in business for 10 years manufacturing outfitting for outdoor enthusiasts and military related items such as backpacks, wristbands, and hiking accessories. It would be located in the Parker building in Old Fort. There would be a One NC grant submitted.

Chairman Walker asked for comments from the public.

There were no comments.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion to go out of public hearing at 5:58pm, second by Vice Chairman Brown. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion to approve \$1,000 per job, the incentive package and authorization to apply for grant, second by Vice Chairman Brown. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

EMS Capital Project Update

Mr. Wooten noted work had begun on the Emergency Services Headquarters as well as Station 4 on US 221 N. The Station 4 project is expected to be completed in six to seven months. The Headquarters on Barnes Road will have extensive grading work before construction can begin. There will be a groundbreaking at a later date.

Public Shooting Range

Mr. Wooten and staff had met with the NC Wildlife staff and England Builders for a pre-construction meeting. Staff is hopeful to issue notice to proceed to England Builders within the month.

Old Morganton Road Property Update

Commonly referred to as Banks Mobile Home Park, the Old Morganton Road property clean up began today of the 14 abandoned mobile homes. The removal process is expected to take 2-3 weeks, and a lien will be placed on the property for the cost of the clean up.

Administrative Items

Mr. Wooten presented EMS write-offs in the amount of \$33,385.74 for consideration.

Vice Chairman Brown made a motion to approve the write-offs, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten presented a list of Landfill write-offs in the amount of \$22,330.65 for consideration. Consensus of the Board was to table the item for further review.

A Nebo Water System fee waiver request was received from Wanda Billings for \$46.71. Documentation was attached confirming the leak had been repaired.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion to approve, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

A Proclamation Declaring August 31, 2020 as Overdose Awareness Day was presented for consideration. The Marion East Community Forum, in partnership with Emergency Services will hold a candlelight vigil on the Courthouse lawn on the 31st.

PROCLAMATION AUGUST 31, 2020 AS OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

WHEREAS, the International Overdose Awareness Day is recognized around the world as a day to acknowledge individual loss and family grief for people who have suffered an overdose; and

WHEREAS, Overdose Awareness Day recognizes overdoses from all drugs, because it reflects the reality of the overdose epidemic, allowing everyone to speak and educate more broadly about the issues; and

WHEREAS, Overdose Awareness Day hopes to publicly challenge the stigma associated with drug use and overdose; and

WHEREAS, Overdose Awareness Day provides an opportunity for people to publicly mourn for loved ones, some for the first time without feeling guilt or shame.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED that the McDowell County Board of Commissioners do hereby proclaim August 31, 2020 as Overdose Awareness Day and encourage members of the community to support those affected by the overdose epidemic.

Adopted this 10th day of August, 2020.

Attest:

Cheryl L. Mitchell, Clerk to the Board

David Walker, Chair

Vice Chairman Brown made a motion to approve the *Proclamation August 31, 2020 as Overdose Awareness Day*, second by Commissioner McPeters. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Tax Matters

Releases over \$100	\$ 2,868.44
Releases under \$100	\$ 609.95
Discoveries	\$ 9,121.03
MV tax refunds	\$ 596.41
Refunds	\$ 340.16
Write-offs	\$ 1,666.59

Vice Chairman Brown made a motion to approve the tax matters, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Legislative Goals

Mr. Wooten noted the NC Association of County Commissioners had started their Legislative Goals process for the General Assembly long session that begins in January. The deadline for proposals to the Association is September 30th. The Board will bring items to next month’s meeting for consideration.

Public Comment – NCGS 153A-52.1

Chairman Walker opened the meeting for public comment at 6:10pm.

Ken Buckner spoke on the need for the public to wear masks.

Public comment ended at 6:24pm.

Commissioners/Staff Reports and Communications

No reports

Adjournment

There being no further business to transact at this time, upon motion by Commissioner McPeters and a second by Vice Chairman Brown, the meeting was adjourned at 6:24pm.

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

David Walker
Chairman