

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION –JULY 12, 2021**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, July 12, 2021, at 5:00p.m., at the Universal Conference Room.

Members Present

Tony Brown, Chairman; Brenda Vaughn; Chris Allison; Patrick Ellis

Members Absent

David N. Walker, Vice-Chair

Others Present

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

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00p.m. The invocation was given by Commissioner Ellis. The pledge of allegiance was given by Commissioner Allison.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Allison made a motion to approve the June 7, 2021 Recessed Session minutes; June 14 Regular Session minutes; June 15, 2021 Recessed Session minutes; June 17, 2021 Recessed Session minutes; June 21 Regular Session minutes; and June 30, 2021 Recessed Session minutes, second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Wooten requested to remove Item D -2023 Property Revaluation Update and add Item G under New Business: Transit Resolution.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the agenda with the deletion and addition, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Parks and Recreation Department Update

Mr. Chad Marsh, Parks and Recreation Director, gave the following update on existing programs, and also a proposed recommendation for future Youth Football League.

At a previous Board meeting, members asked for more adult sports programs. Mr. Marsh advised that on July 23rd, there would be a one pitch benefit AU fundraiser at the Maple Leaf fields. Also, pickle ball gear had been purchased, and he had spoken with pickle ball teams in and out of the county advising there would be open play opportunities in the recreation gym.

He added he had met with Mr. Gino Pride who volunteers at the disc golf course at Universal, to discuss how to garner more interest in disc golf.

Mr. Marsh proposed joining with the Burke County Youth Football League to create a two County League. The new League would be comprised of three divisions by age groups: Pee Wee (5-7 y/o); Mighty Mite (8-9 y/o); and Midget (10-11 y/o). Burke County has also offered their assistance with the rules and guidelines, which had been shared with the McDowell County Youth Football League (MCYFL) Board of Directors. Burke County had also agreed to assist in screening all potential coaches in both counties. The process would be performed by a third-party agency and would result in an increased level of safety and instruction for each child. Also, the McDowell County Parks and Rec Director would serve on the Board of Directors.

Mr. Marsh also is working with Ms. Katrina Bass, owner/operator of McDowell Cheer Master, to assist with the cheerleading program to provide professional instruction in cheer and tumbling.

Chairman Brown thanked Mr. Marsh for his update and noted he had hit the ground running and appreciated his enthusiasm.

Commissioner Ellis appreciated the financial openness of the proposal and knew it would provide clarity for the parents knowing where their money was being used. He would also like to see the teams learn the same plays as the Jr. High and High School teams use, so the league would feed their programs.

Mr. Marsh added the week of July 26th there would be a three-day football camp eligible to all youth in the county, and scholarships would be available. He added there had been discussion of hosting a coach's camp working with MCYFL and school coaches.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to endorse the two-county youth football league, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Connect McDowell Broadband Update

Mr. Keith Buchanan noted Connect McDowell is a coalition of volunteers working to increase connectivity and digital literacy, and is now a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Ms. Madelyn Gaito, Connect McDowell Board member, spoke on the inadequacies of lack of internet coverage. Examples included-- Camp Grier; veteran needing to contact doctor via tele-health unable to because the signal was so weak; citizen who was told internet service ended within 50 ft of their house; MTCC student difficulty in taking test due to spotty service had to take laptop to the parking lot to take test; business in Nebo needing broadband service to serve their business.

The request was for 80% of the American Rescue Plan funds to be earmarked for broadband, and Connect McDowell noted the county could funnel the funds through their agency.

Mr. Wooten noted the county had received \$4.4M of the \$8.8M allocated from the ARP and the funds must be obligated by December, 2023. The Board had previously voted on hiring an engineering firm to run water lines with some of the ARP funds.

Mr. Wooten noted currently counties are not allowed to spend money on the deployment of broadband, and added there have been bills introduced to grant that authority. The county can't lay out

the infrastructure like they can for water lines. Currently Senate bill 689 is in Committee and that could change that.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion for staff to explore the issues related to the county restrictions, and see how the ARP funds can be used for broadband expansion, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis asked if 30 days was enough time to gather the information, and Mr. Wooten noted that was his intent. Commissioner Ellis also requested Connect McDowell address the heavier populated areas first.

NTIA Broadband Grant

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is offering a federal grant to help with broadband deployment. The grant is due August 17, 2021. Spectrum is looking at grant opportunities for populations less than 50,000 in a service area, with gaps in broadband service. The Spectrum Local Affairs representative, Michael Tank, ask for the county to be a partner. Spectrum would install the materials; Foothills Regional Commission would process the grant application and monitor the grant funding.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to endorse the NTIA Broadband grant application, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Old Fort Recreation Property Update

In a previous Board meeting the Board discussed the arrangement of the recreation facilities owned by the Town of Old Fort and leased by the County. The facilities include the swimming pool and the ballfield/park complex across the road. The Town would like to transfer ownership of the properties to the County, with the caveat if the property ever stopped being used for recreation that the property would revert ownership back to the Town.

The Town requested to retain one small portion of the parcel, due to having a water supply system on the parcel with the pool. They also requested to continue to temporarily utilize the large parking lot for gravel storage until a new site can be located.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the arrangement as presented, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

American Rescue Plan Discussion

The County initiated an extension on Stacy Hill Road several years ago. The engineer McGill Associates has the design and permits ready to complete the short segment left of the water line for connection. McGill would be utilized for the bidding and construction administration.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion for staff to proceed with bids, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a motion of 4-0 the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten noted he had gotten more information regarding premium pay per the Board's request. The additional compensation for essential frontline workers allowed for premium pay up to \$25,000 per eligible employee.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to table the item for 30 days and revisit at next meeting, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Shooting Range Update

Mr. Chad Marsh has met with NC Wildlife officials working on the operational side of the facility. The bridge over the Muddy Creek is now complete, and the heavy equipment can now cross over and start on grading. Anticipated finish date is December, 2021.

Building Projects Update

- EMS Headquarters still ongoing; supply issues; looking for January completion.
- N Main St construction demolition of interior, scheduled for completion in January, 2022 for the first floor; lower level completion date in April, 2022.
- Bid proposals for S Garden St parking lot
- Staff is working with engineers and consultants for moving the Probation/Parole employees to the second floor of the Administration Building
- N Main and 60 E Court buildings need new names for the buildings.

Consensus from the Board was to direct staff to come back with naming options, and if a Commissioner has a suggestion let staff know.

Greenway Trail Extension Update

Several years ago, NCDOT awarded the County \$2.2M for construction of an extension of the greenway between Hwy 70 and Resistoflex Road near Greenlee Park. The County is required to provide a \$550,000 match over the next few years.

There were nine engineering firms submitted proposals, and those were narrowed down to three firms. A review committee will do interviews and select the final firm this Thursday. Funds have been budgeted for the engineering phase of \$40,000 local match.

Fire Agreement/Equipment Discussion

Request was received from the City of Marion for the Marion Area Fire Dept to purchase stabilizing jacks and accessories to stabilize overturned vehicles, as well airbags and accessories to lift vehicles, equipment or materials off of a patient. The estimated total for the equipment is \$60,610.08

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the rescue equipment purchase, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten noted staff was working with the City on an updated contract agreement to present to the Board at the October meeting.

Solid Waste/Convenience Center Operation

On Monday, July 5th, the County observed the 4th of July holiday. Approximately 100 trash bags were left outside the gates at two convenience sites due to the facilities being closed. Staff reached out to the Sheriff's Dept since it is considered illegal dumping, and the Sheriff's Dept is seeking to identify the individuals. Discussion followed regarding operation hours of the convenience sites, and signage at

the sites. Chairman Brown requested a feasibility study for opening the sites six days a week and opening on holidays. Commissioner Vaughn requested more information on installing cameras at the sites.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to get signage to list hours and holidays the sites would be closed, post the penalty for littering, and update the county website on the dates the sites would be closed, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

School Grant Proposal – MyFutureNC

The School System has put together a coalition of local partners including the County that will participate in a statewide program called MyFutureNC. The goal of the program is to have 2 million credentialed adults in North Carolina by 2030.

The School System requested the County be the fiscal agent for the grant.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to endorse the program, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Administrative Items

Mr. Wooten presented a request for a fee waiver with the Nebo Water System from Jason and Jessica Garretson in the amount of \$57.50; and EMS write-offs totaling \$57,818.11 for approval.

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

Tax Matters

Refunds	\$ 785.09
Discoveries	\$ 785.09
MV tax refunds	\$ 1,545.00

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the tax matters as presented, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Board Appointments

This being the second reading the following were voted on by written ballot:

- MEDA Board—Approved 4-0 for Jeff Judd and Harold Walker
- Focal Point Advisory Committee—Approved 4-0 for Martha Zimmerman
- Transportation Advisory Board—Approved 4-0 for Margarita Cerda Ramirez; Lloyd Cuthbertson; Jeff Judd; Megan Webster

The vacancy for the Planning Board will be advertised and applications brought to the next meeting.

Transit Resolution

Mr. Wooten noted the County will be receiving three new vehicles within the next couple of

months. NCDOT pays for 90% of the Transit vehicles, and they advised the funding maybe later than the delivery of the new vans. In that event the request was made for approval of a Declaration of Official Intent to Reimburse resolution, so the County could borrow the money and then reimburse itself when the NCDOT funds are received.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the County of McDowell, North Carolina Declaration of Official Intent to Reimburse, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Citizen Comment

Chairman Brown opened the floor for citizen comments at 6:26pm.

Charles Sanders spoke on broadband issues at his house.

Derrick McGinnis spoke on community engagement project and the statement the Board had been asked to approve at a prior meeting regarding racial equity.

Citizen comment ended at 6:35pm.

Reports/Staff/Commissioners

Mr. Wooten will bring information next month's meeting on a salary pay study and solid waste fees.

Adjourn

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 6:36pm, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Attest:

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown
Chairman