

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION –MARCH 15, 2021**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, March 15, 2021, at 11:30 a.m., at the Universal Conference Room.

Members Present

Tony Brown, Chair; David N. Walker, Vice-Chair; Brenda Vaughn; Chris Allison; Patrick Ellis

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Cheryl Mitchell, Clerk to the Board; Lisa Sprouse, DSS Director; William Kehler, ES Director

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 11:30a.m.

DSS Update – Adult Services

Ms. Sprouse gave an update and distributed the agency reports. A copy is with the agenda materials.

Ms. Sprouse noted that March was Social Worker Month, and there are 43 social workers in the agency.

She also noted the Recipient, Eligibility, Determination Audit (READA) would soon be available. The 10-month audit looks to be a really good report on the 200 files that were audited.

There are currently 106 children in foster care. Ms. Sprouse is currently working on her budget request and will submit within the week.

Chairman Brown requested a letter of appreciation be sent to the DSS Social Workers on behalf of the Board of Commissioners for their outstanding work each day.

Ray Burleson, Adult Services Supervisor, noted the Adult Services provides services for:

- CAP --- services provided for help to adults who are nursing home level of care and wish to remain home
- SA-In Home --- services for disabled adults that are rest home level of care and wish to remain at home

- Adult Protective Services --- services for 18 years old or older, alleged to be disabled and in need of protection
- Guardianship ---services for 18 years old or older who have been deemed incompetent by the court. Currently there are 42 clients.
- Monitor facilities --- does routine monitoring for seven large facilities and five small facilities
- Unclaimed bodies have between two to six a year
- Other services include transportation, services for the blind, and housing assistance

Supportive Beginnings

Lisa Martino, Family Liaison, and Laurie Boyle, Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor, gave an overview of the grant funded program, Supportive Beginnings. It is an early intervention program available to new and expectant families across the county as well as elementary-aged youth at a couple of schools.

Supportive Beginnings provides emotional and mental health support through the school-based program available to children who have been identified by the school counselor and attend West Marion Elementary or Eastfield Global Magnet Elementary Schools. Currently involved with 29 families and have had 37 referrals.

Ms. Natalie Gouge, Director of Student Services, noted the program is funded through a grant through July 2021, and other grants have been submitted to expand the program.

Supt. Mark Garrett noted it was harder to find proactive funding than it was reactive funding.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to submit a letter of support for endorsement based on the success and current environment of the county, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Administrative Items

Mr. Wooten presented the Proclamation Declaring April 1 as Broadband Day in McDowell for consideration by the Board.

Proclamation Declaring April 1, 2021 as Broadband Day in McDowell County

WHEREAS, closing the digital divide is important and provides long-term community benefits that include the ability to fully engage in the digital economy, access existing and emerging services, expand economic opportunities, and bridge the economic divide; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the need for available, reliable, and affordable broadband services in all communities; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused schools to shift to distance learning with many students and their parents having difficulty working remotely without adequate broadband service; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the digital divide within low-income and rural communities, and rural and urban residences more apparent; and

WHEREAS, broadband should describe internet services that are high speed, reliable and fulfil the need of our digital residents; and

WHEREAS, all residents, businesses, and institutions need high-speed broadband services where they work, live, learn, and play; and

WHEREAS, high-speed broadband enables work-from-home and remote workers, enhances business efficiencies, drives job creation throughout the region, and connects customers and partners worldwide to goods and services; and

WHEREAS, high-speed broadband benefits the development of industry, new businesses and economic opportunities; and

WHEREAS, high-speed broadband greatly expands the ability of residents to access medical, behavioral, oral health services, and the capacity of public health officials to monitor and respond to health threats such as COVID-19 and other diseases; and

WHEREAS, high-speed broadband enables greater civic participation and brings communities together, helps improve public safety, and makes our transportation systems more resilient and efficient; and

WHEREAS, effective emergency services require using high-speed broadband to integrate data in real time from all available sources, so decision makers have access to the information necessary for the protection of lives and property.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED, the McDowell County Board of Commissioners do hereby proclaim April 1, 2021 as Broadband Day in McDowell County.

ADOPTED this 15th day of March 2021.

ATTEST:

Cheryl L. Mitchell, Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown, Chairman

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the *Proclamation Declaring April 1, 2021 as Broadband Day in McDowell County*, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Saddle and Bridle Club Lease

Mr. Wooten presented the Saddle and Bridle Club Lease for approval. The lease is for county property at 4120 US 226 South, and would be for \$1.00 a year for a ten-year term. The signed lease is on file with the Finance Dept.

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

Ambulance Billing

Ms. Karen Morgan, Purchasing Agent, and Alison Bell, Finance Director, requested to obtain more information on ambulance billing providers, EMS Management and Consultants (EMS|MC) to provide billing for the county EMS bills.

Due to the new Medicaid reform every participate must select one of six providers that have a contract with Medicaid. EMS|MC would enter into the provider contracts on behalf of the county, and bill all EMS client's providers, or clients. Ms. Bell had contacted Burke County who contracts with EMS|MC

since 2010, and their collection rate is at 82%. Burke County does not employ any staff to bill for EMS, other than the collection agency.

McDowell County has 3 staff members and the collection rate currently is at 66%, over all collection rate is at 50%. She would recommend keeping staff to do billing for non-payment.

EMS|MC charges 5% of bills collected, and bills for 90 days. At the end of the 90-day period the bills would come back to the county. Ms. Bell said she would expect collection rates to increase by 10% to go with the collection agency. McDowell County uses Medicare approved rates for all EMS bills.

Mr. William Kehler added his support for EMS|NC as his agency has worked closely with them and they are a very reputable company.

Board consensus was to move forward with discussions with EMS|NC.

MTCC Request

Mr. Wooten noted he had received a request from MTCC to replace the air handler on the roof and for the repair funds to come from this fiscal year's funding. The college had received one quote. Consensus of the Board was to receive more quotes, and present the request at the next Regular Session meeting on April 12th.

Discussion was held on discontinuing offering Zoom during the meetings, due to lack of participation. Consensus was to offer it again at the next Regular Session before making any changes.

Mr. Wooten reminded the Board of their joint dinner meeting with the Planning Board on Monday, March 22nd at 5:00pm.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to recess at 12:57pm to Monday, March 22, 2021 at 5:00pm, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Attest:

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown
Chairman