

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION –OCTOBER 18, 2021**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, October 18, 2021, at 11:30 a.m., at the DSS 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; Jennifer Morgan, Child Welfare Supervisor; William Kehler, ES Director; Adrienne Jones, Deputy ES Director; Andrew Pressley, Deputy EM Director

Call to Order

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

DSS Update

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

Ms. Sprouse discussed the cost of care for foster children. She noted the cost is based on age, and placement “in county” cost from \$435-\$1,000. Group home placement for a teenager is approximately \$5500. The Supervisor and Social Worker make the decision on placement based on what is best for the child.

Discussion was held regarding installation of luxury vinyl tile in the lobby and conference room. Commissioner Ellis requested the conference room be painted before the floor installation.

Ms. Jennifer Morgan, Child Welfare Supervisor, gave a report on how funds were spent that were received from VAYA. Funds went toward a home repair for a foster grandparent taking care of her special needs’ grandchild; vehicle repairs; purchase of air conditioners, and pest control. The funds were designated for keeping children out of foster care.

Ms. Morgan also reported on another State program that gave Incentive Funds to those who were in foster care after the age of 16 years old. For 18-21 years old they could get \$2,500, 14 young adults were able to receive these funds; and for 22-27 years old they could get \$5000, 10 adults were eligible for those funds.

Congressman Madison Cawthorn joined the meeting at 11:51am. Chairman Brown welcomed him to the meeting.

Mr. Kehler gave an update on the October 7th flash flooding event where over 7” of rain fell in a short period of time. There were several water rescues. So far 86 damage reports have been received. Thirty driveways had significant damage; 18 residences had private bridges that were severely damaged or destroyed; 17 locations had severe erosion of banks; 15 residences/businesses flooded; and six vehicles were flooded. Seven residences are still totally dependent on foot bridges. He added there are no state or federal assistance funds available since McDowell has not been declared an IA county from FEMA.

Congressman Cawthorn noted there were locations in Buncombe County that had the same inaccessible issues due to flooding, and suggested the Board join with the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners to lobby to FEMA for public assistance due to the imminent threat to human life. He also suggested have the FEMA Regional Director come to McDowell to access the damages.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion for Congressman Cawthorn to be the intermediary to FEMA to seek assistance with the inaccessible areas, second by Vice Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

The Board discussed other issues they would like assistance with including broadband accessibility and the water filtration system. Vice Chairman Walker requested \$15M to go toward the water filtration system at Lake James. Mr. Wooten noted the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) regulates activity at the lake, and Duke Power representatives advised FERC had a small staff and a lot of projects. Congressman Cawthorn noted he would be glad to send a Congressional letter of interest to FERC to help move the project up.

Commissioner Ellis added 40% of the county does not have broadband, and children were sent home due to the pandemic and had to get in cars to go to locations with internet to study. He added of the 13,000 homes with no broadband access, only half of those homes are being considered by the broadband providers through grant funds.

The Board thanked Congressman Cawthorn for all his help and coming to the meeting. He then left the meeting.

COVID Update

Mr. William Kehler gave the following update:

- There have been 10 deaths in the last week, making it the second highest week of reported deaths since the pandemic started
- The majority of the deaths are unvaccinated
- Hospitalizations are trending downward
- 59% partially vaccinated; 54% fully vaccinated
- Recommended extending the mask mandate until the November 15th meeting
- Extend Crisis Pay until December 31st
- 14-day positivity rate was 8.79%

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to continue the mask mandate for the next 30 days, second by Chairman Brown. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to continue the Crisis Pay for Emergency Services, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Deputy Director Adrienne Jones, reported recruitment for ES has been difficult. She has visited area community colleges and is working on establishing an internship program where they can work into fulltime status. The department is bringing in five interns this week. She also spoke about the mental health aspect of the pandemic on the staff and medical providers.

Mr. Kehler also presented two resolutions for approval regarding FEMA disaster assistance for two fire departments.

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

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to send a letter to HCA and Carolinas Healthcare System requesting them to bring an orthopedic physician to the County to work fulltime, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Mr. Kehler introduced Andrew Pressley as the new Fire Marshall and Deputy Director of Emergency Management. On behalf of the Board, Chairman Brown welcomed Mr. Pressley and expressed his appreciation to the ES staff, Mr. Kehler, Ms. Jones and Mr. Pressley.

Mr. Wooten advised a letter had been drafted to send to the Department of Transportation (DOT) regarding the halting of the work at the Sugar Hill Road bridge across I-40. Mr. Wooten said it was a contractor issue and the closure adds six minutes for EMS to get to Asheville.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to email the letter to the Board for approval, and also request the potholes in the old bridge be repaired. Upon approval of the letter by the Board, send the letter on to the DOT, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten presented examples of the sign for the Administrative offices. Discussion was held regarding a digital sign for the new offices.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the sign as presented, and if there was \$25,000 still available at the end of the project, staff could present options for a digital sign, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Closed Session

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go into Closed Session per NCGS 143-318.11(6) at 12:42pm, second by Vice Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Walker made a motion to go out of Closed Session at 12:54pm, second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 12:54pm, second by Commissioner Vaughn.
By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Attest:

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

Tony Brown
Chairman