

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
RECESSED SESSION –SEPTEMBER 30, 2021**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Recessed Session on Thursday, September 30, 2021, at 11:30a.m., at the Marion Community Building.

Members Present

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

Members Absent

Tony Brown, Chairman

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Cheryl Mitchell, Clerk to the Board; William Kehler, Emergency Services Director; Alison Bell, Finance Director

Call to Order

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

COVID-19 Update

William Kehler, Emergency Services (ES) Director, gave the following update:

- 26% positivity rate
- 21 citizens have died since his last update 17 days ago for a total of 40 deaths
- Hospitalizations have not decreased, length of inpatient is longer than the last strain
- Still no capacity at the hospital
- ES has seen the busiest day ever, 2 transports were made in a ES SUV
- Well care check ups have increased with no family to check on them; Community Care Paramedics have been doing more well care checks
- Hospitals are sending patients home due to no beds, which in turn causes more calls for emergency services when their conditions do not improve

Adrienne Jones, ES Deputy Director, reported on the vaccinations in the county:

- 98% return rate for second doses (this number includes those who received gift cards for their first dose)
- ES has a good supply of Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer and Moderna vaccines

- ES has received an ultra-cold freezer from FEMA at no charge; this enables the staff to store Pfizer in house until the expiration date which will be a great benefit
- 56% are partially vaccinated
- 51% 12 and older are fully vaccinated
- Staff have done several community vaccination outreach programs
- ES full-time staff vaccination rate is 97%
- Break through cases in vaccinated patients with no underlying conditions are seeing their symptoms improve in five days
- ES has only had one known case since the pandemic started
- Younger population is showing a downward trend
- 50-64 age group is steadily trending up and that is driving hospitalizations

Mr. Kehler noted the last 19 months have challenged the ES department due to numerous factors. Call volume affects availability as well as COVID calls; the opioid crisis that has been ongoing; unit turn around times with busy hospitals, including regional hospitals; going from a 60-bed hospital to a 25-30 bed hospital; no orthopedic services at McDowell Hospital; and every COVID patient transported, the unit has to be decontaminated more than what is normally done.

Mr. Kehler reviewed the history of the agency which was founded in 1977 running two ambulances. In 2005 the agency went to three ambulances operating 24 hours a day. In 2016 the agency went to four ambulances; three ambulances at 24 hours a day and one ambulance at 12 hours a day operating at peak times. Later the fourth truck was converted to a 24-hour truck. Since adding the Community Care Paramedic program of six people for a 24-hour period, psychiatric calls, medical alarm activations, fall public assistance, and welfare checks have been diverted to the Community Care Paramedics. Administrative staff have ridden on ambulances when needed; leadership staff have taken weekend on call. Currently two to three leadership staff are working weekends and it is still not enough.

Due to ES staff being mentally and physically exhausted, he respectfully requested to hire two additional fulltime personnel to staff an additional ambulance during peak hours.

Mr. Wooten noted the county could use ARPA funds to fund ES additional staff through this budget year ending June 30, 2022. Funding would have to be found in next year's budget.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to meet the expectations of two fulltime positions as Mr. Kehler requested using ARPA funds for immediate use after interviews at his discretion, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Mask Policy

Mr. Wooten advised the Board had previously set a 30-day mask policy and the policy needed to be revisited.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to extend the mask policy for 30 more days, second by Commissioner Allison. Commissioner Allison suggested revisiting the mask policy at their October 18th meeting. Commissioner Ellis revised his motion to extend the policy to October 18th, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

CDBG Public Hearing

Vice Chairman Walker declared the Board in public hearing setting at 12:10pm.

Mr. Wooten noted the public hearing was originally for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Freedom Life was going to be applying for, and they are now looking at other opportunities. He presented the qualifications for CDBG funding and the NC funding requirements.

1. The amount of funding available for the fiscal year and for the grant round. North Carolina receives approximately \$48,676,191 million annually from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
2. The type of activities that can be funded with CDBG funds in North Carolina is water and sewer infrastructure and economic development.
3. A total of 100 percent of the CDBG funding will be used to benefit low-to-moderate income people. While there is no defined CDBG project at this time, future meetings and a subsequent hearing will provide detailed information regarding how low to moderate income people will benefit.
4. McDowell County has previously received CDBG funds for various purposes. One CDBG award benefitted the Little Mountain community in eastern McDowell County. That project provided clean public water as well as housing rehabilitation to a number of low to moderate income households.
5. Residents with complaints and/or grievances should contact the McDowell County Manager at 100 Spaulding Road, Suite 1, Marion, NC 28752 or at 828-652-2976.
6. While there are no planned activities at this time, any displacement or relocation with CDBG funds must follow state and federal policy.

There were no comments from the public.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go out of public hearing at 12:14pm, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go into Closed Session at 12:15pm, pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(6), second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go out of Closed Session at 12:19pm, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 12:20pm, second by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0 the motion passed.

Attest:

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

David N. Walker
Vice Chairman