

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – December 5, 2022**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, December 5, 2022, at 5:00 p.m., in the Commissioner's Board Room, 69 N Main St., Marion, NC.

**Members Present**

Tony G. Brown, Chairman; David N. Walker, Vice-Chairman; Chris Allison; Patrick Ellis; Lynn Greene

**Members Absent**

None

**Others Present**

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Victoria Craig, Clerk to the Board; Lake Silver, Management Assistant

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes**

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the October 20, 2022 Schedule of Values Public Hearing minutes; November 7, 2022 Regular Session minutes; November 14, 2022 Regular Session minutes; November 21, 2022 Regular Session minutes, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

**Approval of Agenda**

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the December 5, 2022 agenda if there were no requests to add items, seconded by Commissioner Allison.

County Manager, Ashley Wooten, requested to add two items:

- 1) 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Old Fort funding request
- 2) City Council request related to I-40 and the Bypass

Mr. Wooten asked if these items could be discussed under New Business Administrative Items.

Vice-Chairman Walker amended his motion to add the two requested items under Administrative Items, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Selection of Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

Pursuant to NC General Statute 153A-39, the Board shall choose one of its members as Chairman.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to name Tony G. Brown as Chairman.

Commissioner Greene moved the nomination to cease, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Pursuant to NC General Statute 153A-39, the Board shall choose one of its members as Vice-Chairman.

Commissioner Allison made a motion to name David N. Walker as Vice-Chairman.

Commissioner Greene moved the nomination to cease, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Human Resources Policy Update**

HR Director, Anna Lee, reviewed the first draft of the Human Resources Policy Updates. There were many changes, but she only touched on a few. This was the first reading.

The Personnel Policy Manual was reviewed, reformatted, and outdated policies were updated, per the request of the County Commissioners. This was to aid in the cohesiveness and clear understanding of the Policy Manual by all County Employees. There were 22 policies that were updated due to outdated verbiage.

Mrs. Lee provided Commissioners with the new Policy Manual and explained that tonight she would only be discussing a few of the 22 total policies that were updated. Among those policies discussed, she touched on leave and compensatory time, department director minimum leave notice upon leaving the County, ethical conduct, and leaves of absence.

Vice-Chairman Walker asked if the policy updates were similar to those Counties around McDowell. Mrs. Lee confirmed that they were and they matched up to Buncombe and Burke Counties.

Commissioner Greene mentioned that he expects all employees to follow the Policy Manual and he expects Department Heads to be updated on all changes so that they can enforce these policies. Mrs. Lee agreed with Commissioner Greene and ensured him that would be the case.

### **Animal Services Update**

Animal Services Director, Brittany Wright, proposed a school-based animal care program she would like to implement in elementary schools, specifically 4th-grade students. This program discusses how to be a responsible pet owner, helps students understand spaying and neutering, how to be safe around cats and dogs, providing for that animal during its entire

lifespan, animal advocacy, and careers that work with animals. The proposal was preliminarily discussed with McDowell County School staff. Wake County already has a program in place and they have been gracious enough to give us their curriculum at no cost. The only cost to McDowell County would be to pay for copying materials such as ink, paper, staples, etc.

Commissioners expressed high interest in this program.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to support the school-based animal care curriculum and if she needs more than \$500 to conduct this program, she just needs to reach out to the County Manager, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker.

Commissioner Greene asked who wrote the program. Mrs. Wright said she didn't know but would get him the answer.

By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Gary Stroud discussed several ongoing animal welfare efforts. There are two considerations that he brought forward to the Board:

1) He discussed the expansion of the current animal shelter – they fully support the Board's efforts in expanding the current animal shelter.

2) Asking for funding for spaying and neutering - \$19,500.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to use ARPA interest of \$19,500 and encourage the City of Marion to give what they can, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to take a brief recess, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Brown called the meeting back to order at 5:45 p.m.

### **Old Fort Park Grant Proposal**

Carol Price informed the Board that visitor spending increased by 43% compared to the year prior. \$23.42 million dollars were spent by tourists visiting McDowell County last year. Tiny homes and short-term rentals are on the rise.

There was a 62% increase in people who wanted printed material in the mail.

Tim Johnson from Destination by Design presented the Mill Creek Park Project in Old Fort. Mill Creek Park will be just south of Hillman Beer. Some of the Park's key features will be a market pavilion, asphalt path, open green, benches, stream restoration, bridge connector, parking lot, sidewalks, signage, and landscaping. The current total project estimate of probable cost is \$912,105. Mr. Johnson informed the Board that there is a grant application that is due on December 30<sup>th</sup> for \$50,000 and has requested approval to submit the grant application for Mill Creek Park.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the grant application, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

## **Foothills Regional Commission Update**

Foothills Regional Commission Director, Danna Stansbury, introduced herself to the Board and public attendees. Ms. Stansbury comes to the Foothills Regional Commission (FRC) from the Land of the Sky Council of Governments. FRC staff reviewed the Digital Inclusion Plan and the EV Charging Infrastructure Plan.

Alan Toney, Interim Department Director, gave an overview

### **Digital Inclusion Plan**

Isabelle “Izzy” Norman, a Lead for North Carolina Fellow, presented the Digital Inclusion Plan to the Board. The Digital Inclusion Plan intends to provide access to high-speed, reliable broadband, affordable internet and user devices, access to internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user, and access to digital literacy training.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to adopt the digital inclusion plan as presented, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure**

Since 2019, the state of North Carolina has seen a 220% growth in the number of registered electric vehicles. This has led to an increased need in EV Charging Stations. There are different levels of EV Charging Stations. Currently, the City of Marion has a Level 2 Charging Station. There are various programs and grants that are available to finance Charging Stations.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to allow FRC to continue conversations about EV Charging Stations, apply for grant funding, and come back before the Board in 3 months with an update, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

## **Building Projects**

### **Services Building**

The project architect CBSA has completed the baseline drawings and has not begun the drawings for the proposed renovation work.

### **Old EMS Station**

Staff has worked over the last few weeks to prepare the building for removal. The lead paint and asbestos contractor has been through the building and has begun to identify potential contaminants. Several potential asbestos spots have been identified that will need to be abated by a specialist before the building can be removed.

### **Paving**

The Garden Street lot has been paved. The landscaping around the lot will be addressed.

### DSS Building

The Request for Quote "RFQ" for Architectural Services resulted in eight responses. Staff is reviewing the packets and would like to have a recommended firm for your review/approval on December 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **Parks and Recreation Projects**

#### Recreation Center

The project development of the Recreation Center's scope of work continues. The architect has requested a meeting with the pool consultant who will help design that component of the project. The consultant has the plans and is working on the technical requirements of the pump system. The goal is to have this project out to bid in mid-January.

#### Grant Applications

The Maple Leaf playground grant was successfully submitted. Staff will present a recommended PARTF application at the January meeting.

### **Water System Projects**

Staff continues to work on an unprecedented number of water-related projects. Below are several water-related updates:

- The County's engineer continues to work on the engineering and design for both Phase I and Phase 2 of the Nebo Water System expansion. Phase 1 is very close to bidding. Phase 2 (which involves extensions of lines westward towards the City's system) is only in the beginning of design.

- McGill Associates has begun the design work for the Hoppy Tom Hollow Water Project. The anticipated bid date is scheduled for July 2024.

- An Appalachian Regional Commission grant to extend water around Exit 90 has been submitted and is pending a decision from State and Federal officials.

- The study of water service to the West Marion Elementary Area is underway. An ARC pre-application has been submitted.

- A grant for service along NC 126 was submitted by the September 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. The review process will probably take about two months.

### **Administrative Items**

At the November Board meeting, representatives from the Old Fort 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee came and requested funding for their event. The Town of Old Fort is supporting the program at \$4,000. McDowell Chamber of Commerce is contributing \$2,500.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve a contribution of \$2,500 to the Old Fort 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to match what the McDowell Chamber of Commerce contributed, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

The City of Marion has requested the Town of Old Fort and McDowell County to join together to write NCDOT to work on preventing wrong-way traffic on the Interstate and Bypass.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to endorse the letter being requested, seconded by Commissioner Allison.

Chairman Brown suggested adding in the letter that there be an interstate ramp added at Nix Creek. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve EMS write-offs, approve the Resolution for the sale of firearm and badge for Deputy Tommy Lytle, and the donation of one of the old Transit vans that is no longer in service to Freedom Life Ministries, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Board Appointments**

There was a second reading for the Transportation Advisory Board. There were 4 seats expiring in the month of December and 5 seats are available. Brenda Vaughn, Barbara Norton, Dawna Ledbetter, Amy Stevens, and Joyce Poplin have applied to serve on the board.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the applicants to serve on the Transportation Advisory Board, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

There was a second reading for the Library Board of Trustees, which had one vacancy. Brenda Vaughn applied to serve the board.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve Brenda Vaughn to serve on the Library Board of Trustees, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Upon completion of her term as County Commissioner, Commissioner Brenda Vaughn left various seats on committees vacant that will need to be filled by another sitting Board member.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve Commissioner Greene to serve on the Foothills Regional Commission Board of Directors, Foothills Rural Planning Organization, Transportation Advisory Board, and Tourism Development Authority; Commissioner Allison to serve on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council; and Commissioner Ellis to serve on Connect McDowell, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Tax Matters**

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve tax matters as presented, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Citizen Comment**

There were no citizen comments.

### **Commissioners/Staff Christmas Greetings**

Commissioner Allison read the Christmas Story, per County tradition. Each Commissioner, County Manager Ashley Wooten, and Clerk to the Board Victoria Craig, expressed their gratitude to serve McDowell County and wished all of the County a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

**Adjournment**

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to adjourn at 7:07 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

---

Victoria Craig  
Clerk to the Board

---

Tony G. Brown  
Chairman