

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION – August 29, 2023**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session on Tuesday, August 29, 2023, 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/Deputy Clerk to the Board; Ronald Harmon, Deputy Manager for Community Development; Alison Bell, Finance Director

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat Discussion

Chairman Brown asked Mr. Wooten to give an overview of the strategic planning process and to introduce the speakers.

The County Manager noted that the Board of Commissioners make decisions strategically, but there is not a document that reflects the strategic thoughts of the Commissioners.

Mr. Wooten introduced Kyle Case and Jeff Emory from the NC Department of Commerce staff. Mr. Case and Mr. Emory introduced themselves and spoke about their organizations.

Mr. Case introduced himself and asked each Commissioner to introduce himself. The staff also introduced themselves.

Mr. Case noted that he will ask the Commissioners to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. He asked for the Commissioners to note strengths of the organization. Several strengths noted included EMS/Law Enforcement, reputation for collaboration, natural resources (which were noted as being both a strength and an opportunity). A strong board and youth programming in the Parks and Recreation department. Additional strengths mentioned included competitive pay, strong service delivery for various departments

such as the Senior Center, Parks and Recreation, and others. The Shooting Range and the Black Bear Park and Campground were listed as other assets.

Mr. Case asked for an overview of weaknesses. Broadband, waste collection and disposal, Department of Social Services facility needs, state and federal ownership of land in the county as it relates to the tax base. Additional concerns mentioned included substance use disorder, workforce issues, transportation, adult and child care.

(Chairman Brown left the meeting at 6:15)

There was a discussion of the various opportunities that exist. Several were mentioned including natural resources, transportation, manufacturing companies. Lake James is a strong natural asset. The proximity to the Asheville and Charlotte airports were identified as a positive. McDowell Technical Community College was listed as another community asset. The various high school programs, including the career and technical education programs, were mentioned as a huge positive. The support of veterans was mentioned as a positive attribute as well.

Mr. Case asked for threats. The federal government policies were mentioned as a threat. The homeless population was mentioned as a concern as well. Several manufacturing closures were mentioned including Ethan Allen and Kitsbow. Aging infrastructure in several places in the county such as Old Fort were mentioned. State funding for schools was mentioned as a concern as well. Affordable housing was mentioned as a concern. Medicaid expansion was listed as an opportunity as well as a threat.

Vision Development

Mr. Case asked to shift the conversation to visioning. A discussion of improving County facilities and potentially placing as many services as possible under one roof.

Maintaining and perhaps growing the population, attracting and retaining quality staff, maintaining a low tax rate, maintaining strong partnerships, protecting natural resources while also promoting them. Diversifying the revenue sources that are funding government sources was also discussed. Maintained a diversified economy was also discussed. Healthcare services including HCA and UNC Health were mentioned. Substance abuse, homelessness, and elder care were other concerns that were identified. Addressing senior, workforce, and affordable housing was also mentioned. Parks and Recreation programming was mentioned as a need to be strong as well. A desire to maintain the small-town feel was expressed as a desire.

Next Steps

Mr. Case noted that several of the next steps would involve assembling a working group of internal and external representatives who would help take the thoughts of the Commissioners and put them into some draft documents.

A discussion of incorporating public input followed.

Appointment of Clerk

Mr. Wooten noted that there needed to be a public vote on the Clerk to the Board candidate. Commissioner Greene motioned to appoint Charity Turner-Coates as Clerk to the Board with a second by Commissioner Allison. The vote to appoint Ms. Turner-Coates was 4-0.

Adjournment

Commissioner Greene made a motion to adjourn at 5:53 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Ashley R. Wooten
Deputy Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown
Chairman