

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – December 18, 2023**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on Monday, December 18, 2023, at 11:30 a.m., in the Commissioners Board Room, 69 N Main Street, Marion, NC.

**Members Present**

Tony Brown, Vice Chairman; Chris Allison; Lynn Greene; Patrick Ellis

**Members Absent**

David Walker, Chairman

**Others Present**

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Charity Turner-Coates, Clerk to the Board; Bobbie Sigmon, Amber Vess;

**Call to Order**

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

**A. DSS Data Report / Meg's Place Emergency Shelter**

Vice Chairman Brown recognized McDowell DSS Director, Bobbie Sigmon.

She stated there are currently 97 children in foster care, which is down from 107. The goal is to have permanence for children as quickly as possible. McDowell DSS is on track to reach the set goal of adoptions for the fiscal year.

The Christmas drive for youth in the foster care system was a success, with every child receiving gifts. The community did step up to help other youth who would not usually receive gifts through McDowell DSS.

Director Sigmon updated the Board on all of the current vacancies at the agency.

The Child Support Unit is meeting and exceeding set goals and is fully staffed.

Director Sigmon spent the majority of her time updating the Board on the increase in almost every area, such as energy, Medicaid, and food nutrition.

Director Sigmon introduced Mrs. Amber Vess to the Board, explaining that Mrs. Vess has a goal of opening a home that would prevent youth from sleeping at the DSS office and placing them in a home setting. The home will have a kitchen to provide better nutrition, a restroom with a shower, bedrooms, and a washer/dryer.

Mrs Vess addressed the Board, explaining that she would like to eliminate children from sleeping at DSS. She and her husband have started the Live Like Megan Program in honor of her daughter she lost to cancer.

Mrs. Vess has been a foster parent for over 19 years and a Guardian ad Litem for approximately 10 years.

The home has been purchased and the Gateway Foundation is the owner of the home. Mrs. Vess, with the help of the Gateway Foundation, applied for the Dogwood grant and received this grant. The home will be designed as a temporary shelter. The hope is to provide for every child who comes into the home or who comes into the foster care system with every item needed for the first week of care. Many children come into the foster care system without items needed for basic care.

The home will also have a visitation space for children and parents and when a child is in the home, social workers will also be present.

County Manager Wooten did explain to the Board, that this type of home is somewhat of a gray area as it is not regulated or licensed by the state of NC. This could create some concerns for insurance and liability services.

Mr. Neil Gurney with Gateway Foundation, did explain the foundation is the owner and the home is insured.

Commissioner Greene asked if the home had been purchased and the amount of the grant that was received. Gateway will be backing the home, they own the home and the home is being leased to Live Like Megan Foundation.

A motion was made to allow the County Manager to continue looking into the home and using volunteers by Commissioner Greene and was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 4 to 0, the motion passed.

**B. Sheriff Redaction Request**

County Manager Wooten updated the Board on additional information obtained about the NC Statute of the redaction of information and the county's attorney interpretation. There are currently two interpretations, one in support of the redaction of information and one that is in opposition.

Commissioner Greene stated, his position has not changed and he does not see a law that has been passed that states "you shall" or "must" do this. He feels if the redaction is done for one, it should be done for all. Until a law is passed that states you must or shall, he does not support the measure.

County Manager Wooten explained to the Board, and the County Attorney after much discussion if you move forward with the redaction, you could be restricting what is known as public record. The law is written currently that could be interpreted to allow for the redaction of law enforcement information but if you start adding other agencies, a policy change would need to take place.

The County Attorney's recommendation does not align with the interpretation of Catawba County but the County Manager explained to the Board it was their decision.

Commissioner Greene made a motion to deny the request for the information redaction due to the way the current law is written and the motion was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 3 to 1, the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Brown voted against the motion, stating views it as a simple request that would not cost the county anything financially.

Commissioner Allison made a motion to send a letter to the state legislatures J. Johnson, D. Greene, and Warren Daniels asking for more clarification on NC G.S. 153.98 (C)(4). If there are changes to the statute then the item would be looked at again. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 4 to 0, the motion passed.

#### **C. Tax Releases**

County Manager Wooten presented tax releases that contained a clerical error on the tax card being 100% complete and they were not. There is a refund.

A motion was made to approve the tax matters by Commissioner Greene and was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 4 to 0, the motion passed.

#### **D. Farmland Preservation Plan Grant**

County Manager Wooten shared with the Board, that there was a \$5,100 match that is required for the Farmland Preservation Plan grant and asked if the Board wished to move forward with the grant.

A motion was made by Commissioner Allison to move forward with the grant and was seconded by Commissioner Greene.

#### **E. Duke Energy Easement**

County Manager Wooten informed the Board that Duke Energy has asked for an easement on property near Universal to serve Forza.

A motion was made by Commissioner Greene to approve the easement and was seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4 to 0, the motion passed.

#### **Closed Session**

A motion was made by Commissioner Greene to enter into a closed session per NC G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) at 12:20 pm and seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 4 to 0, the motion passed.

A motion was by Commissioner Allison to come out of the Closed Session at 1:25 pm and was seconded by Commissioner Ellis.

**Adjournment**

A motion was made by Commissioner Allison to adjourn at 1:26 pm and was seconded by Commissioner Ellis.

Attest:

---

Charity Turner-Coates  
Clerk to the Board

---

Tony G. Brown  
Chairman