

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – January 23, 2023**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, January 23, 2023, at 11:31 a.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; Anna Lee, HR Director; Bobbie Sigmon, DSS Director

DSS Update

Bobbie Sigmon, DSS Director, presented the Board with data updates dating back to July of 2022. All of the data for CPS Assessments and Foster Care have been changed since July due to incorrect information. Mrs. Sigmon informed the Board that the Department is a little high on the recidivism rate in CPS. The Department will be training with CPS, the child welfare unit, and foster care in February. Commissioner Walker asked Mrs. Sigmon how many children were in foster care in McDowell County. She informed the Board that at the end of December, McDowell DSS had 105 children in their custody.

There are difficulties with emergency placements involving children in DSS custody who are a risk to themselves and those around them. Mrs. Sigmon is having to enact legislation for hospitals to keep children at their facility because there is no placement safe enough outside of the hospital. Mrs. Sigmon is communicating with other DSS Directors in the state trying to get something in place to protect the safety of children, foster parents, and social workers.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to endorse what the DSS Director's Association is trying to do for the placement of mentally unstable children and holding mental health facilities accountable instead of turning children away who qualify for services via a letter of endorsement or resolution, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

There was further discussion regarding the safety of DSS staff during the event of a lack of placement for at-risk children in DSS custody.

After talking with IT, DSS will need a new server, which will try to be incorporated into next year's budget. The paper system needs to be updated to digital in order to be more effective.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to allow staff to look into other options regarding the vendor software, seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

DSS Building

Staff met with the chosen architect company, Little Diversified Architectural Consulting, and discussed various pathways to take regarding the renovation/rebuild of the current DSS building located on East Court St. in Marion.

Ashley Wooten requested the Board to decide on if they want a new build for the DSS facility or if they prefer to expand the current building.

Vice-Chairman Walker made comments about his stance on choosing a completely new build for the DSS facility. Commissioner Greene agreed with the points that the Vice-Chairman made.

Commissioner Greene made a motion to allow staff to explore a new build for DSS facilities, seconded by Commissioner Allison. Commissioner Ellis said he wants staff to continue making improvements on the current DSS building as well. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

HR Policy Review

Anna Lee, HR Director, presented the updated HR Policy Manual to the Board. Mrs. Lee informed the Board that she sent out the approved draft HR Policy Manual to Department Heads to review and give feedback. There were two comments given to Mrs. Lee.

1) Compensatory Time: It has been requested to take out the statement regarding exempt employees not being allowed to have a balance of more than 80 hours of compensatory time. There's no monetary gain from carrying over 80 hours for exempt employees. If they don't use their time, then they lose that time. However, for non-exempt employees, it is still recommended to lower the balance from 200 compensatory hours to 80 compensatory hours for liability purposes.

There was a considerable discussion among Board members, Mrs. Lee, and the County Manager. It was decided that employees have until June 30th, the end of the fiscal year, to get their compensatory time below 80 hours.

2) Dress Code: Mrs. Lee informed the Board that several department heads asked that wearing jeans on Fridays be considered to be added to the Policy Manual.

After deliberation, the Board decided to not allow employees to wear jeans on Fridays in order to uphold a high level of professionalism.

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to approve the changes for the dress code, compensatory time, and the Policy Manual as a whole effective February 1st, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

ARC Water Grant

Mr. Wooten reviewed the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Grant with the Board and reiterated that it was involving the West Marion Elementary/ Providence Area Water Project.

The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$1,770,534 by the engineer. McDowell County is a Transitional county, which means ARC funds will cover 50% of the project cost up to \$500,000, for a total of \$500,000.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to sign the proposed letter that indicates McDowell County will match the ARC Water grant for \$500,000 with McDowell County committed to protecting the non-ARC portion of the project with local funds totaling \$1,270,534, seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Closed Session

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to go into Closed Session at 1:10 p.m. pursuant to N.C. G.S. 143-318.11 (a)(6), second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go out of Closed Session at 1:24 p.m., seconded by Vice-Chairman Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

No action was taken.

Adjournment

Vice-Chairman Walker made a motion to adjourn at 1:25 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Allison. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Victoria Craig
Clerk to the Board

Tony G. Brown
Chairman