

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – June 9, 2025**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, June 9, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., in the Commissioner's Board Room, 69 N Main St., Marion, NC.

**Members Present**

Chairman, Tony Brown; Vice-Chair, Lynn Greene; David N. Walker, Trisha Garner and Patrick Ellis

**Members Absent**

**Others Present**

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Sena A. Allison, Clerk to the Board; Fred Coats, County Attorney; Marlan Brinkley, McDowell Public Library Director; Andrew Pressley, ES Deputy Director and Lake Silver, Representative of Congressman Chuck Edwards

**Call to Order**

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. The Prayer was given by Commissioner Walker. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Garner.

**Approval of Minutes**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve May 12<sup>th</sup> Regular Session Minutes, May 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Special Session Minutes, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

**Approval of Agenda**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the agenda, with a request by Mr. Wooten to strike from the Agenda Item C. under Appointments; Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail Update and be moved to July's Agenda. Mr. Wooten requested the replacement of Item C. go to Lake Silver (Congressman Edward's office) for an update to the Board on his new role, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

## **McDowell Public Library Update**

Marlan Brinkley began by thanking the Board for the opportunity to share updates, as he spoke on the Old Fort Library set to reopen on July 1<sup>st</sup>, after being closed for 9 months due to Helene damage. He told the library looks great, with the possibility of a soft re-open in the next few days. Mr. Brinkley noted a celebration coming later in the summer to welcome everyone in the community back, and extended the invite to the Commissioners as well.

Mr. Brinkley spoke on the 5-year strategic plan that was introduced at the last Board meeting he attended, with the statement of the strong relationship that has been obtained with the Libraries and McDowell County Schools. He highlighted Crystal Hamby, Michelle Baker and Ashley Greene with their generosity in making connections within schools throughout the County, as well as the efforts of Julie McKinney of the Library and her team visiting all the schools and offering enrichment classes to the students.

Chairman Brown relayed he was happy to see the Book Mobile at the Trails and Trains Festival last weekend, with Commissioner Walker adding his pleasure that the Book Mobile visits all the schools and noted the private ones as well.

Julie McKinney (Programming and Outreach Librarian) spoke on her excitement to be able to work at the library as well as give an update on the Summer Reading Program. She went over June's calendar and brochure pointing out the opportunities that will be offered this summer for toddlers, children, teenagers and adults. Ms. McKinney told of the book called The Dot, by author Peter Reynolds whereas pages of the book have been placed in the windows of several businesses throughout Marion's downtown, for citizens to be able to read the book as they walk and enjoy the main street area.

Chairman Brown thanked both Mr. Brinkley and Ms. McKinney for giving their updates.

## **Helene Recovery Update**

Mr. Pressley spoke on stepping into Mr. Kehler's role to give this month's update and began with telling it is day 258 of the EOC Activation with the following updates:

### **Current EOC Operation**

- EOC continues addressing the citizens' needs

### **Current Recovery Roadmap**

- Debris Removal, Housing and Hazard Mitigation

### **Debris Removal**

- Right of way (ROW) Debris Removal has ended.

- A total of 165,773 cubic yards of debris was removed from McDowell County roadways.
- Personal Property Debris Removal (PPDR) application period has ended.
- 1,441 applications submitted.
- JBW awarded the PPDR contract to the first 400 applications.
- Work is ongoing for the first 400 applications submitted.
- FEMA and Army Corp of Engineers will continue to assess the remaining applications.
- Waterway Debris Removal is ongoing, with a total of 1,031,707 cubic yards of debris removed from local waterways as of 06/08/25.
- Army Corp. of Engineers reports of 70% completion of all the debris missions in McDowell as the total breakdown being 28% personal and 81% waterways.
- Debris removal will be ongoing for several months.

#### Private Roads and Bridges

- Residents should complete the online interest form via NCEM website at <https://ncdps.gov/Helene/PRB>, with EM staff cross checking their data on applications filed.
- The timeline to finish all work is September of 2026.
- A meeting is scheduled for June 10<sup>th</sup> with NC Private Roads and Bridges at the EOC for updates.

#### EOC and VOAD Coordination for Housing

- Emergency Operation Center (EOC) and Volunteer Organization Assisting in Disasters (VOAD) is led by Jerry Lewis and Victoria Geurink who have focused on Emergency – Rapid – Repair to ensure homes are safe, sanitary and secure from damages caused by Helene.
- 502 total requests for emergency repairs, 427 have been completed, 46 are pending and have been adopted, with 29 rebuilds pending.

#### Hazard Mitigation Programs

- FEMA/ NC Emergency Management Program are for residents whose structures were destroyed or heavily damaged by floodwaters to apply to have their structure evaluated to make it more resilient for future floods.
- Currently 35 + 1 Parcels have been applied for in Acquisition buyout, 21 Elevation applications, 17 Generator Projects, 12 Landslide and Wildfire Mitigation in the design phase.
- An upcoming meeting is scheduled regarding the Wildfire Mitigation program, with AB Tech, NC Forestry Division and EM.

#### Priorities Next 30 Days:

- Continuation of addressing critical needs of citizens

- Debris Operations
- Housing Repairs
- Hazard Mitigation
- Implement long term recovery strategies

#### Hurricane Season 2025 Preparedness

- The Annual Hurricane/Flash Flood Exercise was conducted on May 28<sup>th</sup> with over 90 participants from other agencies.
- EOC staff are working on after action Helene items as well as identifying items during the exercise to build the plan going forward.

#### McDowell County Helene Hotline

- Hotline # is 828-652-3241, operating 24 hours a day

Mr. Pressley answered Commissioner Ellis's question of the debris site in Old Fort being closed, as the site is still active with no date yet given to close. Chairman Brown thanked Mr. Pressley for the update.

#### Lake Silver Update

Mr. Silver was welcomed to give an update on his new position within the district, whereas he thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak. He gave news of Tommy Laughter leaving his post; how Congressman Edwards gave his congratulations to Mr. Laughter and gave a public thanks to the tremendous work Mr. Laughter has done for his district. He went on to say especially to WNC in Helene recovery. The boardroom gave a round of applause to Mr. Laughter, with Chairman Brown addressing Mr. Laughter on behalf of the Board with thanks on all he has done in his role with congratulations to his next endeavors and noted looking forward to Mr. Silver taking on his position. Mr. Silver revealed the feat it took by Rep. Laughter in opening the Ingle's warehouse as soon as it was after the storm, noting if this accomplishment had not occurred the community would have been hurting more. Rep. Silver spoke on how he will be in McDowell frequently, as this is now his district with his excitement to serve his home community. He extended that he would collect case work that the County's constituents need and will assist with priorities of the Board as well.

Mr. Silver lastly thanked the Board for allowing him to speak and is looking forward to seeing them more.

#### Water System Projects

He told of the East End project in Nebo that has taken a long time to start but did on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Phase 2A and 2B are starting to complete, with Phase 3 approved by DEQ, but waiting approval by the NCDOT on some particulars, adding this is ARPA funded. He told of the requirements and deadlines that all the project must be complete; all the money must be spent and reimbursed back to the County by December of 2026. Exit 90 projects have just

been submitted for local permits, with the West Marion Elementary project requiring a booster station. Mr. Wooten disclosed the funding of this project as: \$500,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission, approximately \$4 million in appropriations from the General Assembly, and \$500,000 from the school system- totaling around \$5 million. There is an estimate for the booster coming in at \$700-800,000 which Mr. Wooten gave details on looking for other sources to assist in the difference in the funding.

Chairman Brown asked if there had been a study on what the interests are in that area to have County water, with Mr. Wooten told there were a few businesses asked. He disclosed there has not been a door to door or email campaign. There was a discussion on the route/loop that the water lines will go, with Commissioner Walker reminded the Board of the State being gracious with the \$4 million give and their allowance to further funding if the need arises for projects they have given to. He spoke on the Fire Department, Churches and other businesses in the area that benefit from this project and made a motion to send a letter to Warren Daniels and Dudley Greene (who were helpful in receiving the \$4 million initially), and to the State for their need of additional funding. Commissioner Walker brought up the project is on hold due to the lack of funds and the December 2026 deadline. Chairman Brown asked the Manager if there is a termination date for the funds the project has been approved for, in which Mr. Wooten answered yes, however they are years away.

Commissioner Ellis asked the County Manager to find out the cost of running the water lines down Sugar Hill Rd, just to the school system as well as the loop. Commissioner Ellis stated the school system may back out their funds if we do not do this, with a second to Commissioner Walkers motion on sending the letter stating clearly the applied for amount and what is needed now. Commissioner Ellis continued with the number one goal is to make sure the lines go to the school, then asked what the estimated price was to get the line to the school only, in which Mr. Wooten told he would get that amount to the Board.

Vice Chair Greene asked if the plan indicated where the booster station would be located, with Mr. Wooten answering where the master meter is, on the Miller Property. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **County Property Update**

Mr. Wooten relayed a termination notice given by the owners who lease the property on 4<sup>th</sup> Street to the County. He explained the lease has been in place for approximately 10 years for \$300.00 per month and will expire at the end of July. Mr. Wooten added the owners have agreed on a month-to-month basis. The County Manager noted the dilemma of about 15 vehicles that park on this property now, making the suggestion to park at the jury lot or South Garden. There was a general discussion on the parking situation currently, with Commissioner Ellis making a motion of allocating parking to the suggested lots, as well as to speak with the city on a joint cost for a parking area, with a second by Commissioner Walker. Commissioner Walker discussed the current 98 spaces that are for DSS employees, along with others who park on the property with Chairman Brown interjecting that the parking is for the employees and directed staff to tell the businesses and persons using this lot, to find parking elsewhere, as this is provided by the County for DSS only. Commissioner Walker recognized to let it be known the County is having to give up their lease, with Chairman Brown declaring he did not want to be

asked by an employee why they are having to walk outside of their designated spots and others are allowed to use their spaces. Commissioner Ellis amended the motion to have the conversation with the ones who have no ownership or business with the DSS, stating the County is having to look for parking options with the possibility that they will be cut out of their complimentary parking during the work week. A discussion was had on not spending money on other areas yet, with Mr. Wooten adding the need would continue for overflow parking. Commissioner Walker recalled when the City asked the County for financial support on a parking lot and how this would be a good gesture for them to reciprocate costs as soon as funds are identified. Commissioner Walker seconded the amended motion. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Animal Shelter Update**

Mr. Wooten spoke on the Board's recommendation to evaluate a replacement site on College Drive, to which there were challenges such as the creek, interstate right of way, the need to reroute the walkway and property owned by MTCC with a stipulation extended to them on property use.

The County Manager noted the Spaulding Rd property appears to be suitable according to the architect that the County has worked with. Mr. Wooten relayed fund-raising discussions have taken place with him and Ms. Bell for a campaign like what the EMS had done, as well as what Burke County accomplished through an established friend group.

Chairman Brown asked about the Shooting Range property as a conceivable site, in which Commissioner Walker agreed and would like the Shooting Range site to be identified, with an architect drawing, adding the State had requested a new Shelter 5 years ago. Commissioner Walker then made a motion to identify the site, with the findings brought back to the Board at a future meeting, with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Budget Update**

Mr. Wooten pointed to the Property and Sales Tax Collection report and County revenue and Expenditure reports. He spoke on the public hearing for the Budget meeting, which will be held on 06/16/25 at 11:30 a.m. as well as the Project Budget amendments.

Vice Chairman Greene made a motion to approve the budget items, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

- GF 37 - Allocates salary/benefit increases and revenue sources across var
  - GF 38 - Transfer between line items and allocate revenue for Animal Shelter and McDowell Tech
  - GF 39 - Transfers between line items in various line items
  - GF 40 - Transfers between line items and appropriate revenue in Emergency Services
  - GF 41 - Appropriates loan proceeds for
  - REVF1 - Appropriates the revaluation fund balance to complete contract
  - FD1 - Allocate estimated sales tax collections between the fire/rescue districts
  - FD2 - Allocates estimated property tax collections between the fire/rescue districts
  - DS1 - Appropriates fund balance for debt payments
  - CP1 - Transfers between line items in County Projects
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- DS2 - Appropriates and transfer funds from the school project fund
- 911F1 - Appropriates grant revenue and Fund Balance in the 911 Fund
- SP1 - Amends School Project Fund
- ENT1 - Transfers between lien items and allocates interest revenue
- NWENT1 - Allocates revenue in the Water fund
- UENT1 - Transfers funds to the Universal project
- SI1 Allocates revenue sources for the Self Insurance Fund

#### **Administrative Items**

Mr. Wooten went over the EMS transport write-offs for June as \$46,598.26. He reviewed a finance resolution for several County vehicles.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the budget items, with a second by Vice Chairman Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Board Appointments**

The Clerk to the Board presented the Memo with a request for the Board to reappoint Will Kehler to the McDowell Tech Community College Board of Trustees.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to reappoint Mr. Kehler to the MTCC Board of Trustees, with a second by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Tax Matters**

Mr. Wooten spoke to the Board on the releases, rebills, refunds and discoveries for the month of May:

Non-Collectable: \$ 477.49

Motor Vehicle Tax Refunds: \$ 1,600.29

Releases over \$100.00: \$ 1,098.44

Releases under \$100.00 \$ 465.30

Refunds: \$ 0.00

Discoveries: \$ 0.00

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the tax matters as presented with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Citizen Comment**

N/A

### **Commissioners/Staff Reports**

Mr. Wooten reiterated the public hearing on the Budget to be held on June 16, 2025 at 11:30 a.m.

Chairman Brown asked if staff had spoken with the owners of the meat processing plant, in which Mr. Wooten said there was a site visit last week, whereas they discovered the store was not able to work, however there is still interest in leasing part of the property for certain sell dates. Chairman Brown noted it would work better for the County in that capacity.

### **Closed Session - General Statute 143-318.11 [a] [6]**

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go into closed session at 6:10 p.m., with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.



Commissioner Ellis made a motion to come out of closed session at 6:22 p.m., with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to come out of closed session at 6:23 p.m., with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

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Sena Allison

Clerk to the Board

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Tony Brown

Chairman