

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – May 19, 2025**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, May 19, 2025, at 11:30 a.m., in the Commissioner's Board Room, 69 N Main St., Marion, NC.

**Members Present**

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

**Members Absent**

Patrick Ellis

**Others Present**

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Sena A. Allison, Clerk to the Board; Nick Washburn, Dysartsville Fire Chief and Adrienne Jones, Assistant ES Director

**Call to Order**

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

**Dysartsville Fire Tax Request**

Chief Nick Washburn spoke to the Board on the first Dysartsville Fire Tax, which was implemented 25 years ago at 4 cents. He revealed 10-12 years ago it was raised to 6 cents. This increase allowed the Fire Department to:

- Add additional vehicles to their fleet
- Add a UTV
- Purchase multiple tools
- Acquired a property at 72 Club House Rd
- Constructed a second station to house an engine, tanker and brush truck to better serve the South End district
- Fully renovated the club house with making a modern 2400 square foot space, which can be used as an emergency shelter if needed
- The new Station 2 is certified by the department of insurance, allows for quicker in route and on scene times, resulting in lower loss of property
- ISO Rating improved from 9F to a 6-9E, in which some areas were unrated prior to the new station being built
- Transitioned to 12 hour paid staff, 7 days a week with 1 person per shift at Station 1

- Purchased the 35 Club House property, with the aid of a local church and private citizens, for an emergency landing zone as well as double as a large staging area in the event of a disaster
- Awarded multiple grants, updated systems and installed automatic generators at both stations
- Ordered a new engine in November of 2023 for \$840,000.00, with the arrival date of later this year

Chief Washburn reiterated the higher costs to operate, noting they only have a small debt from a no interest loan. He formally requested the Board for an increase in the Fire Tax of 2 cents to a total of 8 cents. This will allow for additional paid staff, 24/7 coverage, an additional engine/tanker and to construct a certified landing zone.

Chairman Brown commended their service, what they have been able to do within their Department giving thanks to pulling together the resources they had to provide for their needs. The Chairman gave accolades for it being many years since they asked the Board for anything, and gave his support on their request.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the Fire Tax increase as presented, commending the details of what they have accomplished, along with being frugal to their requests of the Board, with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Brown added the ISO rating being lowered to a 6 will save homeowners more money on their insurance and there should be no notice on the tax increase.

### **Hemp Derived Cannabinoids**

Mr. Wooten told the Board the speaker, Ms. Wilson requested to present this item at a later date, possibly next month. The Chairman agreed for this be stricken from the agenda.

### **FY 2026 Opioid Recommendations**

Ms. Jones thanked the Board for the opportunity to give an update on the Opioid Settlement funds. She gave a recap that these funds are used for critical opportunities that allow front line services and community organizations to continue work of substance abuse disorder. She spoke of the timelines for RFP proposals, as well as telling of the interest form that was posted for anyone interested to serve on the review panel. Ms. Jones told this panel consisted of 5 organizations who were tasked to review the proposals, which totaled 11. Once scoring was complete, the team made sure they aligned with the MOA, and was reviewed by the Opioid and Substance Use Action Team (the State's legal advisory team). This process led to 8 being able to proceed to the next phase. Ms. Jones directed the Board to the proposals and thanked all who put forth applications, the volunteers and the partners involved in the process.

## **A RESOLUTION BY THE COUNTY OF McDOWELL TO DIRECT THE EXPENDITURE OF OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS**

WHEREAS McDowell County has joined national settlement agreements with companies engaged in the manufacturing, distribution, and dispensing of opioids, including settlements with drug distributors Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen, and the drug maker Johnson & Johnson and its subsidiary

Janssen Pharmaceuticals;

WHEREAS the allocation, use, and reporting of funds stemming from these national settlement agreements and certain bankruptcy resolutions ("Opioid Settlement Funds") are governed by the Memorandum of Agreement Between the State of North Carolina and Local Governments on Proceeds Relating to the Settlement of Opioid Litigation ("MOA");

WHEREAS McDowell County has received Opioid Settlement Funds pursuant to these national settlement agreements and deposited the Opioid Settlement Funds in a separate special revenue fund as required by section D of the MOA;

WHEREAS section E.6 of the MOA states:

E.6. process for drawing from special revenue funds..

a. Budget item or resolution required. Opioid Settlement Funds can be used for purpose when the Governing Body includes in its budget or passes a separate resolution authorizing the expenditure of a stated amount of Opioid Settlement Funds for that purpose or those purposes during a specified period of time.

b. Budget item or resolution details. The budget or resolution should (i) indicate that it is a authorization for expenditure of opioid settlement funds; (ii) state the specific strategy or strategies the county or municipality intends to fund pursuant to Option A or Option B, using the item letter and/or number in Exhibit A or Exhibit B to identify each funded strategy, and (iii) state the amount dedicated to each strategy for a stated period of time.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, in alignment with the NC MOA, McDowell County authorizes the expenditure of opioid settlement funds as follows:

1. First strategy authorized

Name of strategy: Community-Based LCSW/LCAS Support  
Strategy is included in Exhibit A.

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$18,750.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place: Start date July 1,  
**2025 through End date June 30, 2026**

Description of the program, project, or activity: This supports a licensed clinical social worker/ licensed clinical addiction specialist to be embedded on the IMPACT OUTREACH team, a mobile, multidisciplinary initiative that delivers counseling and behavioral health services to individuals with opioid use disorder in McDowell County. The clinician provides harm reduction resources, facilitates mental health referrals, and engages in trauma- informed outreach to individuals in homes, shelters, and encampments who face significant barriers to traditional care.

Provider: CareNet Counseling of Marion

2. Second strategy authorized

Name of strategy: Recovery Community Services

Strategy is included in Exhibit A.

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: Supports the expansion of peer-led recovery services and outreach at McDowell County's only Recovery Community Center. Operated by certified peer support specialists, the center provides walk-in access to recovery support, harm reduction resources, health navigation, and connection to social services. The program also includes weekly street outreach to individuals who are unhoused or otherwise disconnected from care, creating a low- barrier path to treatment and recovery services.

Provider: CareReach

3. Third authorized strategy

Name of strategy: Low-Barrier MOUD Outreach

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 2

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: Supports expanding access to low- barrier, harm-reduction healthcare services for individuals with opioid use disorder in McDowell County. Services include the launch of a mobile health station in a high impact community, post-release MOUD access for individuals exiting detention, and post- overdose care in collaboration with EMS. The program integrates medical, behavioral health, peer support, and case management services to reach underserved populations where they are.

Provider: High Country Community Health

4. Fourth authorized strategy

Name of strategy: Marion Police Department Peer Support

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 10

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: Supports a full-time certified peer support specialist embedded within the Marion Police Department to assist individuals with substance use disorder during or following encounters with law enforcement. The program provides non-criminal alternatives by connecting individuals to treatment and recovery services, conducting follow-ups, and helping to reduce unnecessary arrests and hospitalizations. This diversion-based approach builds trust, improves outcomes, and reduces repeat law enforcement contact.

Provider: Marion Police Department

#### 5. Fifth authorized strategy

Name of strategy: Recovery Housing Support

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 4

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: This project provides recovery housing and related support services for individuals with substance use disorder, using a Housing First approach. The program focuses on low-barrier access and supports individuals receiving Medication-Assisted Treatment as part of a broader recovery plan.

Provider: Mission Ministries Alliance

#### 6. Sixth authorized strategy

Name of strategy: Recovery Development

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$16,204.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: Supports an expressive arts program that offers individuals in recovery a therapeutic outlet through structured creative activities, promoting emotional regulation, self-expression, and engagement in the healing process. Provides peer support training for individuals with lived experience of substance use disorder, equipping them with the skills and certification needed to serve as certified peer support specialists and contribute meaningfully to the recovery community.

Provider: McDowell Partnership for Substance Awareness, Inc.

7. Seventh authorized strategy

Name of strategy: FREE Structured Recovery Services

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 5

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$1,480.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: Supports the FREE (Focused Resilience and Engagement Experience) Program, a structured recovery support initiative designed to help individuals with substance use disorder build self- efficacy, stability, and long-term wellness. The program includes individualized support, skill-building, and peer engagement activities that address social determinants of health and reinforce sustained recovery through consistent mentorship and guidance.

Provider: McDowell Partnership for Substance Awareness, Inc.

8. Eighth authorized strategy

Name of strategy: Peer Support Expansion

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: This project funds a peer support initiative led by Western North Carolina Community Health Services in collaboration with the West Marion Community Forum. The initiative addresses workforce gaps in behavioral health and enhances access to culturally responsive, evidence-based support for individuals receiving substance use and MOUD treatment.

Provider: Western North Carolina Community Health Services

9. Ninth authorized strategy

Name of strategy: Substance Use Disorder Response Coordinator Plan

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 1

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$110,000.00

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: The Coordinator will engage in stakeholder engagement, planning activities, data analysis, program evaluation, and gathering and reporting relevant information.

Provider: McDowell County Emergency Services

10. Tenth authorized strategy

Name of strategy: EMS Peer Support Specialist

Strategy is included in Exhibit A

Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3

Amount authorized for this strategy: \$134,471

Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2025 through End date June 30, 2026

Description of the program, project, or activity: Supports an embedded peer support specialist in EMS. The role bridges clinical care and peer recovery support by providing EMT-level services in the field and trauma-informed coaching for individuals recovering from overdose or substance use. Working within the Post Overdose Response Team (PORT) and Community Paramedic program, this position supports harm reduction, linkage to care, follow-up after overdoses, and coordinated recovery support in both emergency and non-emergent settings.

Provider: McDowell County Emergency Services

The total dollar amount of Opioid Settlement Funds appropriated across the above named and authorized strategies is \$530,905.00.

Adopted this the 19th day of May, 2025

Vice Chair Greene made a motion to approve the recommendation as presented, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten noted the County staff works with the contracted agencies as well, telling of contract that outlines the requirements for the accountability of the awarded funds.

### **Administrative Items/DSS Update**

Mr. Wooten began with the DSS items, starting with the monthly MOU data the Board was given. He told of a few pending hires in the CPS department, and spoke on reaching out to Appalachian State University in their Criminal Justice Department for prospecting investigators. Mr. Wooten told there have been a few applications sent in from this process, relaying they will do more outreach to other University's as well. A brief discussion was had on the way to keep social workers, with the Chairman recommending to lobby our legislators for incentives to fill vacancies.

Commissioner Walker made a motion for staff to draft a letter in support of incentive directives in bringing on social workers, with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Garner asked if there was a CSST position added, in which Mr. Wooten said yes and explained this would help fill the gap with being short of social worker positions. The CSST staff do not hold a 4-year degree, however they can step in to assist facilitating visits,

transports, and placing transports. A brief discussion was had on the contracted agency we use to visit out of County children, with Commissioner Garner asking how many of the 94 DSS children in care are in the County, with Mr. Wooten to get this number back. He noted he will make the request to have her question be added to the MOU chart going forward.

Commissioner Garner also asked for Mr. Wooten to let the Board know when the next Foster Parent training classes would be, in which Mr. Wooten said he would and told there is currently a class being given. Commissioner Walker asked how many Foster Families the County currently has, mentioning some want specific ages, in which Mr. Wooten recalled the number was in the twenties, but he will let the Board know an exact, as soon as he can find out.

Mr. Wooten moved to the administrative structure of the DSS Department, and told the Board he would like to present the option, under their direction, to change the current Oversight Governance to a Consolidated Human Service Agency model. He guided the Board to see their memo that listed some details of what this would entail. Mr. Wooten told how the County once was under that structure, and spoke of the change giving the ability for consistency on the employment rules. This would regulate staff, permit all DSS employees to fall under the County personnel policies, and would make the HR Director's job more uniform. He pointed out how this system would also permit clear lines of communications and authority, which can be misleading and confusing under the existing model. Mr. Wooten added under the Consolidated format, the manager would appoint and dismiss the Director, with the approval of the Board.

Vice Chair Greene made a motion for Mr. Wooten to put together a recommended outline with hierarchy with policy directives to be presented at the next monthly 11:30 a.m. Board meeting, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten went to the Administrative items, pointing to budget amendments GF17-36, documents, along with project budget ordinances 2024 Foothills NC HOME Consortium, Hoppy Tom Hollow Amendment 3, and Nebo Water Project Amendment 4.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to accept all Administrative Items presented, with a second by Vice Chair Greene. Mr. Wooten asked for the approval of the technical corrections of the Animal Control Ordinance and the change of audit companies to Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co., whereas Commissioner Walker amended his motion to include the Animal Control Ordinance corrections and the contract approval for the new audit firm, with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:02 p.m., with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.



Attest:

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Sena Allison  
Clerk to the Board

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Tony Brown  
Chairman