

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – March 10, 2025**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, March 10, 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; William Kehler, EMS Director; Josh and Ashley Clark, Blueridge Processing owners; Susan Pyatt-Baker, MACA Executive Director; Michael Gaffney, Foothills Conservancy Conservation Specialist and Serina Hinson, Audit Manager at Loudermilk, Church Auditing Firm

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the January 6<sup>th</sup>, January 21<sup>st</sup>, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, February 24<sup>th</sup> 2025 Special Session minutes and the February 10<sup>th</sup> and February 17<sup>th</sup> 2025 Regular 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 second by Commissioner Ellis. Mr. Wooten requested a closed session after the meeting, as well as the additions of a request by the Trains and Trails Committee and an authorization to purchase an Ambulance. Commissioner Walker amended his motion to include the items Mr. Wooten requested, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Blue Ridge Processing Update**

Chairman Brown welcomed Josh Clark to give an update on the Blue Ridge Processing company, with his wife Ashley Clark who are the owners. Ms. Clark began with telling they had purchased this facility from the County in 2023, in which it was formerly the Foothills Pilot Plant. She disclosed they are a USDA Inspected meat processing facility who specializes and focuses on added items for farmers in order to give back to the community. Ms. Clark noted their business increased after Hurricane Helene and they are expecting to expand into a retail space, as they are currently serving 143 farmers by purchasing and processing for them. They are bringing in business from every point of N.C., Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia and S.C. telling last year they were able to process 70 beef, 231 pigs and 81 lambs totaling approximately 171,000 lbs. going into our community. Ms. Clark projects to at least double those numbers this year and will hire a few more employees, add a store which will be a local market. She noted they would like to open another facility in a few years to produce jerky and snack sticks that farmers currently have to travel out of the area to do have produced.

Mr. Clark spoke of the investment they had put into the facility and their upcoming investments to increase their business. Mr. Clark requested to rent or lease the lot below their building for their store's location, whereas Chairman Brown said this is something the Board will discuss once the County has more clarity and detail.

Commissioner Walker made a motion for staff to begin negotiations with a lease document for the Board to review, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Brown told he is happy to hear of this success and is glad they could purchase and use this building from the County to serve the community. The Chairman added the encouragement to any farmers to contact Blue Ridge Processing soon as they continue to get more active.

### **Sheriff Request for SRO at OF Elementary**

Chairman Brown welcomed Sheriff Buchanan to speak on behalf of the need for a Safety Resource Officer (SRO) at Old Fort Elementary. Sheriff Buchanan began by thanking the Board for their support in the safety of McDowell County Schools teacher and students. He told there are currently seven SRO's that have been granted to the Sheriff's Office. He spoke of their partnership with McDowell County Schools and gave accolades to the Superintendent and School Board in this. The Sheriff said there is an approved grant for the opportunity to the Sheriff's Office to have a dedicated SRO at Old Fort Elementary, adding they do have a good candidate for this position. He voiced how the SRO's are the front-line communicators for the ability to enhance safety, to detour threats, respond quickly to emergencies and have the teachers not having to be focused on security concerns. Sheriff Buchanan told SRO's are skilled in readiness to emergency situations, medical emergencies, prevention of crime or violence, bullying and fights.

Sheriff Buchanan disclosed the grant covers the \$44,000.00 salary, with the remaining salary to be split between McDowell County Schools, the Sheriff's Office, and requested for the Board to contribute to the balance of \$13,500, plus equipment. Vice Chair Greene asked about

an emergency situation outside of the School, could that SRO be used, in which he answered if the deputy can be used as a first responder, he does expect his officers to answer if needed. Commissioner Walker spoke on the children's safety, with the importance that they can learn and be protected.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the requested amount needed to place an SRO in Old Fort Elementary, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. Chairman Brown asked if the Town of Old Fort would be contributing to the position, in which Mr. Wooten noted he has not posed this question to Old Fort, adding he does know they are struggling post-Helene. Vice Chair Greene asked how long the grant is for, in which the Sheriff answered there is no set terms to end. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Brown told the Sheriff Buchanan that the Board is honored to be a part of the SRO program, in which the Sheriff agreed and stated he is as well.

### **MACA Update**

Chairman Brown invited Susan Pyatt-Baker to give updates on the McDowell Arts Council Association (MACA), in which she thanked the Board for their support of the arts. Ms. Baker-Pyatt told that MACA has been in McDowell for 52 years, and she is in her 18<sup>th</sup> year. She disclosed the County had been their biggest operational support, with how the State Assembly began supporting the Arts Council, and currently McDowell County Schools are their biggest supporter. She updated the funding they received from MCS this year as \$30,000.00, with the additional grant writings done by the Arts Council, in the amount of \$50,932.00.

Ms. Pyatt-Baker highlighted a program called "Keys for Kids" where the funding is given through the NC Arts Foundation and how McDowell County was chosen as one of seven, across the State to be awarded. This program donates key boards to the schools and is free piano lessons for students in public schools, providing two 30-minute classes per week. This curriculum is led by Nathan Shirley and operates at Old Fort Elementary, North Cove and has just expanded to West Middle School.

Ms. Baker-Pyatt revealed due to the relationship between MACA and the NC Museum of Arts, McDowell County has obtained an after-school program for the Middle Schools to give art instruction, with paid materials and are offered in the Fall and Spring.

Ms. Baker-Pyatt spoke about a library program that enables adults with disabilities to receive art lessons paid by MACA and is offered at the McDowell Library, each first Tuesday of the Month at 1:30 p.m. She told of another program MACA was awarded last year through a grant called the 'Military and Veteran Healing Arts Grant' which allows veterans to do crafts free, and will be given at each of the Senior Centers. Ms. Baker-Pyatt emphasized how the National Endowment of the Arts heard about this program, and want to bring a retired Navy doctor and 3 art therapists to review this Veteran's program.

Ms. Baker-Pyatt highlighted what is MACA is currently doing, as displaying art from MTCC in their gallery; their art gift shop with local artist work represented; art classes; theatre; McDowell Children's Theatre and Technical theatre.

Lastly telling of her being on the America250 Committee, she and Dr. Jordan Laney had applied for the 250 grant, totaling \$30,000.00 and received it. This project is called “Beyond 1842 McDowell County Oral History and Community Archives”. She noted when they received the email that told they were awarded the grant, the email proclaimed ‘the panelist enthusiastically endorsed the project’. The Directory explained to the Board, from the research the Committee is doing, this will be a project that can live on well past 2026.

Commissioner Walker congratulated Ms. Baker-Pyatt for the success of grant writing and the Chairman thanked her for all she does with the MACA Program.

### **Helene Update**

Chairman Brown welcomed William Kehler to give an update on Hurricane Helene Recovery. Mr. Kehler began with this being day 167 of the EOC Activation and told the EM is in full recovery mode. Mr. Kehler gave the following updates:

#### **Current EOC Operation**

- EOC currently addressing the citizens needs on: Debris Removal, Human Services, Situation Unit, Finance Section and Public Information.

#### **Roads**

- NC 80 Hwy is the only road not fully open, it is for local traffic only and school bus turnaround.

#### **Lakes**

- Lake Tahoma: continues work with FEMA and the US Army Corp of Engineers on debris removal.
- Work is expected in the next 7-14 days to estimate 400 to 500 thousand cubic yards of debris, whereas 75% of Marion’s water comes out of Buck Creek – making it essential to clean the waterway appropriately.
- Lake James: Duke Energy has two of the three hydro machines on line with the ability to move water, and monitor rainfall.

#### **Community Comfort Stations for citizens with water issues**

- Old Fort at 135 Water Street is the only station that remains open.
- This includes 24-hour access to showers and laundry in trailers.

#### **FEMA Disaster Recover Centers (DRC)**

- McDowell Senior Center (Lower Level) 100 Spaulding Rd. opened Hours are Mon-Friday 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Saturday 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- It was announced the deadline for Individual Assistance (IA) has been extended through April 7, 2025.

- Traffic Count average is 25-30 visits per week, with the acceptance of Saturday's.

#### FEMA Individual Assistance for McDowell County

- Total amount paid to McDowell County thus far is \$20,595,561.00.
- Total applications filed thus far is 11,615.
- Average per application is \$1,773.00.
- Total number of applicants receiving the maximum payout of \$42,500.00 thus far is 40.

Commissioner Walker asked Mr. Kehler what can the Board do to assist in getting more from FEMA for our citizens, in which he answered to continue to give Congressional Delegation information, adding they meet weekly with FEMA and constantly advocate for the citizens of this County for quicker inspections and less denials. Mr. Kehler noted these numbers are very discouraging, with this being the worse disaster in McDowell County's history and there are many in the community who could use the funding assistance.

#### Temporary Housing Update

- TSA Hotel Voucher's – total of 15 families
- Direct Housing (Needing FEMA trailer or direct lease) = 3

#### 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.
- 30 plus groups have been involved with the housing response. The lead organization is Baptist on Mission, along with other faith based, charity groups who continue to grow and are focused on repairs for citizens to move back in their homes safely.
- These organizations coordinate twice a week at the EOC and is growing in numbers.
- Assistance can be sought by the Hotline number of 828-652-3241 or the [mcdowellcares.org](http://mcdowellcares.org) website directing to Baptist on Mission.
- 443 total requests for emergency repairs, 303 have been completed, 86 are pending, 72 have been adopted and 54 that have not been able to contact, with the EM team trying to locate.
- VOAD Organizations Represented on 3/5/25: Grace Community Church, Gateway Foundation, SOS -Greg Withrow's Group, Landis OPC, Baptist on Mission, Divine Disaster Relief, Biltmore Church, LDR, Adventures Relief, Samaritan's Purse, Red Cross. NC Emergency Mgt., McDowell EM and FEMA

## Debris Removal

- Debris totals from Army Corp of Engineers, as of March 10 2025: 234,204 cubic yards of debris removed, 256,000 cubic yards estimated remaining allowing for a total of 490,050 cubic yards.
- Debris pick up is on right of way on State roads, private roads and developments, and waterway debris.
- Personal Property Debris Removal (PPDR) that cannot be put within 10 feet of the right of way, can be applied for at [mcdowellgov.com/debris](http://mcdowellgov.com/debris) or in-person at the ES Headquarters at 129 Barnes Rd.
- 314 applications submitted to McDowell EM/JBW (Contractor for USACE)
- 40 applications submitted to FEMA and others being reviewed.
- These applications are for persons who have debris on their maintained property, trees around houses, next to driveways, and any that threaten infrastructure damage to property.
- Waterway Debris Removal crews are working diligently to clean up creeks and rivers as well as the lakes.
- Right of way (ROW) first pass completion March 1, 2025, ROW final pass estimated for April 1, 2025, visible and hazardous waterway debris 100% complete estimated for May 1, 2025, waterway debris mission estimated completion is June 1, 2025, public property debris removal estimated completion is June 30, 2025 and commercial property debris removal estimated completion is June 30, 2025.
- Final pass throughs have started, if someone still has an issue call the Helene Hotline at 828-652-3241.
- Temporary Debris Sites are on East Main Street in Old Fort and US 221 N at the old H&B Lumber Company.

Commissioner Walker asked if there is any rechanneling of the waterways during this cleanup, for the security of incurring big rains or another hurricane, in which Mr. Kehler stated that would be done in Phase 2.

Mr. Kehler showed several pictures of the waterway cleanup in different locations, along with the equipment being used to handle the debris.

## Private Roads and Bridges

- There are over 150 bridges that are damaged in the County.
- The State has allocated \$100 million with the program to run through NCEM Hazard Mitigation.
- Persons who have damaged roads, culverts or bridges should apply for FEMA IA at the DRC, with the recommendation of taking pictures of the damaged area.

## Old Fort

- EOC staff continues to support the Town of Old Fort with recovery operations.
- Waterway debris removal along Old Fort Elementary, Mill Creek and Catawba River.
- Catawba Falls has reopened.

- The removal of a mobile home in the waterway was completed near Exit 73.
- EOC staff conducting a field assessment on 3/18/25 to ensure citizens know what is available until the closing period .

#### 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.
- Another alternative (that is voluntary only) for residents, is to apply for a buyout, which would be evaluated at fair market value one day before the storm, with no commitment until you sign paperwork.
- Residents apply online at [www.NCDPS.gov/HM](http://www.NCDPS.gov/HM)
- Currently 32 Parcels have been applied for in Acquisition buyout, 22 Elevation applications, 8 Generator Projects and waiting for guidance on Landslide and Wildfire Mitigation.

#### Priorities Next 30 Days:

- Continue addressing critical needs of citizens
- Debris Operations
- Housing Repairs
- Hazard Mitigation
- FEMA Reimbursement/FEMA Building & Parks Repair Projects
- Implement long term recovery strategies

#### McDowell County Disaster Hotline at 828-652-3241

- Operating 24/7 for all storm related questions and information where citizens can call and be assisted by a member of the EOC team.
- Calls reported are mostly water, well and septic issues, the need for heaters, FEMA and private bridges and culverts being out.

Mr. Kehler noted with all the details and numbers he gives, there are families, children and elderly behind these, adding the EM's main goal is to continue to advocate for them, while treating them with compassion, respect and empathy in pushing the recovery process.

Mr. Wooten mentioned speaking with other Counties that are in recovery and stated how blessed ours is to have Mr. Kehler's leadership and team. A brief discussion was had on the staff, with Vice Chair Greene congratulating the ones who were recently promoted. Mr. Kehler recognized he is blessed to work with such a talented team and thanked the Board for their support on any requests he has needed from the County.

Mr. Wooten petitioned the Board for their endorsement of an Ordinance to allow the authorizations that exist under Statutes for Counties, to have the ability to remove an obstruction (in the sense of debris) from property.

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

Mr. Wooten went over the cash flow loan program the General Assembly made available to every City and County affected by Helene. This is \$100 million for Governmental units to use on the front end to pay for expenses as these entities wait for FEMA reimbursement. He requested the authorization for McDowell County to participate.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to accept the loan proposal as presented, with a second by Commissioner Walker. Mr. Wooten interjected there is no interest and the 1<sup>st</sup> payment would be due in approximately 1 year for \$1.00, adding the second payment would be 10% of this in June of 2027. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Chairman Brown acknowledged how much the Board has in the responsibility to all the County's agencies in contributing to the needs of each. He gave an example of a citizen who was upset for the increase at the Transfer Station for tipping, and was immediately told by another citizen they should raise it higher. The Chairman made the point that the Board has the heart to take every concern, interest and need they are given and makes the best decisions from their abilities and resources.

### **Conservancy Foothills Conservation Project**

Chairman Brown recognized Michael Gaffney to speak to the Board. Mr. Gaffney explained the FCNC is a land trust type of environmental 501C3 nonprofit whose primary mission is land conservation, stewardship, education, recreation and trails management. The Conservancy was founded in 1995 and has protected approximately 71,490 acres. They are based in Morganton, accredited with the Land Trust Alliance partnering with NC State Parks, NC Wildlife Resources Commission and the US Forest Service. They serve 8 Counties, 3 major river basins and have done over 146 conservation projects, including Catawba Falls, Bob State Creek Park and sections of the Greenway.

Mr. Gaffney told of a project at Hickorynut Mountain in McDowell County that he is requesting support by the Board, to apply for federal funding to purchase this property. He spoke on the benefit to the County if they acquire this property as: the split between the NC Wildlife Resource Commission for hunting, fishing, trapping etc. and NC State Parks for public trails and recreation with 6 plus points of public access. There will be public access for the Wilderness Gateway State Trail of approximately 170 miles, which will have the ability to serve individuals with physical disabilities and will have positive economic impact to the County. The 2024 data for McDowell's outdoor recreation totaled approximately \$28,000,000.00.

Mr. Gaffney cited the short drive and distance for Buncombe residents and surrounding Counties to enjoy what the project encompasses as well as the conservation values for plants, species and streams. He highlighted this being the last large parcel of this size in WNC and asked the Board for a letter of support endorsing the grant application. Chairman Brown told he was very excited for this project.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve and endorse the grant application, with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

## **FY 2024 Audit Presentation**

Chairman Brown invited Serina Hinson to give the Board the findings on the 2024 Audit. Ms. Hinson issued a clean, unmodified opinion. She explained once completed the report goes to the State Treasurer's Office for their review. She received from that office an indicator to look at several items, in which her firm will give the Board updates to any changes. Ms. Hinson highlighted the General Fund in comparison from 2023 to 2024 as follows:

<b>McDOWELL COUNTY</b>			
<b>Financial Highlights</b>			
<b>Years Ended June 30, 2024 and 2023</b>			
	<b>2024 Summarized Budget</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>
<b><u>General Fund</u> (Includes Revaluation Fund)</b>			
Total assets		\$ 29,633,466	\$ 25,983,522
Fund balance		\$ 27,527,519	\$ 23,693,291
Fund balance - Committed for Tax Revaluation (included in total fund balance)		\$ 194,443	\$ 65,239
Total revenue	\$ 64,392,099	\$ 65,832,862	\$ 58,258,846
Total expenditures	\$ 66,328,972	\$ 63,525,863	\$ 54,182,372
Revenues over (under) expenditures before other financing sources (uses)		\$ 2,306,999	\$ 4,076,474
Other financing sources (uses)	\$ 1,936,873	\$ 1,527,229	\$ 1,047,287
Increase (decrease) in fund balance		\$ 3,834,228	\$ 5,123,763
Ad valorem taxes collected		\$ 35,266,158	\$ 28,773,193
Percent of taxes collected - current year levy		99.54%	99.67%
Investment income		\$ 1,180,594	\$ 536,500
<b>Fund Balance Available - without Revaluation Fund</b>			
Available Fund Balance		\$ 19,779,397	\$ 17,533,275
Expenditures and transfers to less financing sources		62,376,916	55,853,537
Available Fund Balance % - without Revaluation Fund		31.71%	31.39%
<b>Fund Balance Available</b>			
Available Fund Balance		\$ 19,973,840	\$ 17,598,514
Expenditures and transfers to less financing sources		62,251,916	55,913,450
Available Fund Balance %		32.09%	31.47%

*The Local Government Commission has grouped units of government by general fund expenditures for purposes of evaluating available fund balance as a percentage of expenditures. Minimum available fund balance is 20% for fiscal year 2024 and 2023.*

Commissioner Walker asked what % the State recommends for a County the size of McDowell for the Fund Balance to be at, in which Ms. Hinson answered the minimum is 20%, the median is 39% and McDowell is at 32.9%.

Ms. Hinson moved to the performance indicators which lists McDowell favorable to all, with the exception of a negative indicator as the audit submission date. She disclosed Lowdermilk Church Auditing Firm was at fault to this late admission, adding the firm takes full responsibility. Ms. Hinson cited they were in constant contact with the State Treasury's Office with updates on being behind due to delays from Hurricane Helene and a cyber attack to their system. She continued the audit with no budget violations, no material weaknesses, statutory violations or debt service payments. She cited a Government letter included that asked if the Firm encountered any difficulties, consulted with any other Firms, in which they did not.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the FY 2024 Audit as presented, with a second by Vice Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten told the Board the Lowdermilk Church Auditing Firm will no longer be able to perform our audit and the County will put out an RFP for auditing services for the FY 2025 audit. He thanked Ms. Hinson with regards to Ms. Bell for their performance with this and the previous audits.

### **Building Projects**

Mr. Wooten began updates as the following:

Transfer Station: bid the Board approved last month, having a few details to complete and gave a reminder of this being a disruptive construction, adding the second set of scales are on order and scheduled to be installed at time of development.

Recreation Center: project is nearing completion, the pool is expected to be open for swim season and the funds remaining will go specifically to repaving the parking lot, locker room restoration and bleachers for the gym. The bleachers are estimated to be delivered and installed by the fall basketball season.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to get the bleachers on order, with the remaining funds from the Rec construction project, following a brief discussion on the repaving material and locker room restoration materials to be ordered as well. Commissioner Walker amended his motion to take the remaining funds for the 3 projects to be ordered, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Animal Shelter: the Board is being asked to begin the fundraising efforts to add to the proceeds of \$1 million that have been set aside for a new shelter identified on Spaulding Rd.

Commissioner Walker made a motion for staff to contact the community members, bring the list to the Board in formal recognition to form a committee on fundraising efforts to the Animal Shelter location, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Services Building: State funding is the projected means for the HVAC's replacement to the existing unit, staff is currently consulting a mechanical engineer to proceed.

DSS Building: on hold due to the lack of Federal assistance from legislation.

### **Water Updates**

Mr. Wooten updated the East End project as beginning soon; Nebo Phase 2A and B are under way with multiple signups and interest; Phase 3 serving additional side roads in Nebo proceeding with permitting; the Exit 90 project under review and lastly the Providence Area/West Marion Elementary Area project will have the master meter located near the Pilot Truck Stop, adding there will be a new engineer to replace the previous.

### **Universal Grading Park Phase 2**

Mr. Wooten spoke of a grant received 3 years ago to grade a building pad that is now occupied by a shell building near the County's Universal Building. He told a second grant has been received to grade a second site, as well as Golden Leaf Funds available for this project. Mr. Wooten went over open bids with the request of the Board to approve the low bid, and enter into the minutes.

**CERTIFIED AS A TRUE AND CORRECT TABULATION OF BIDS RECEIVED**



Michael Lovoy, P.E.  
Senior Project Manager

**Project Name:** Universal Technology Park Rough Grading – Ph 2  
McDowell County, North Carolina

**Project No.:** 23003

**Bid Location:** McDowell County Administration Building  
69 N. Main Street,  
Marion, North Carolina, 28752

**Bid Date:** March 3, 2025 @ 3:00 PM

CONTRACTOR	AMOUNT OF BID	ORDER OF BIDS
CRW Land Services, LLC	\$2,031,950.00	1
Bradley and Conner Grading Contractors, Inc.	\$1,191,362.00	2
JLS Company	\$1,070,450.00	3
Sisk Grading, Inc.	\$1,389,250.00	4
Site Development Corporation	\$832,812.50	5

Vice Chair Greene made a motion to enter the bids into the minutes and receive the low for the grading project, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. Chairman Brown noted there is much interest in this property currently, proving this is a worthy project. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

## **Legislative Advocacy**

Mr. Wooten presented the list for the Capital Needs for McDowell County, which will be sent to the legislative delegation, with the understanding most fund needs will go towards Hurricane Helene relief. The request is for the approval to submit the items.

### **Capital Needs for McDowell County**

DSS Building (\$40 million) – McDowell County is in a dire need to consolidate all of the DSS functions in the county under one roof instead of three separate facilities, which makes it hard for the end user to access needed services.

Solid Waste Transfer Station (\$8 million) – The current transfer station was designed to handle around 70 tons of waste a day, but often handles 200 tons a day.

Lake James Intake and Treatment Plant (\$35 million) – McDowell County has sought to permit Lake James as a drinking water source. An intake site and a treatment plant site have been identified and the lake has been redesignated as a drinking water source by the State of North Carolina.

Water System Additional Extensions (\$8 million) – McDowell County has built out a water system in the Nebo area of the county. Recently, design work began on a project to extend public water southwest of Marion. This funding will allow for that area to fully be built out with public infrastructure.

Animal Shelter (\$3 million) – The current animal shelter was built in 1980 for a county approximately half the population size. The existing building took on water during Helene and was not able to shelter evacuated animals (or any animals for that matter). A building site has been identified away from water.

Recreation Center Upgrades (\$7.5 million) – The Recreation Center in downtown Marion is currently undergoing the first phase of a facility upgrade including the construction of a new outdoor swimming pool. Additional phases will include the construction of a new baseball facility on the same property.

Services Building Renovation (\$2.5 million) – The Services Building (old Administration Building) was built in 1976 using federal revenue sharing. The building needs systems upgrades to ensure it is able to provide services to the public for another 50 years.

Fonta Flora State Trail Extensions (\$5 million) – The County and its partners have constructed several disconnected segments of the Fonta Flora State Trail around the county. The funding would help make connections between existing segments.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to endorse the list as presented by the County Manager, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

## **Revenue Discussion**

Mr. Wooten went over levies the County is able to utilize for certain expenses received by sales tax. The discussion went to the Board for consideration to a one-quarter cent sales tax

to be implemented, if voted in by citizens in a referendum. The voting would be held when all precincts are open for a primary or general election. This is known as Article 46, in which 48 Counties have enacted successfully. Mr. Wooten noted the tax revenue can be spent on any lawful purpose as well as the budgetary impact this revenue would generate. He disclosed the amount being around \$1.3 million annually, based on current sales. Commissioner Ellis asked if the County would have to inform the General Assembly prior to placing this on the ballots, in which Mr. Wooten said the only notification would go to the local Board of Elections. Commissioner Ellis asked if there has to be a specific detailed item on the ballot, in which Mr. Wooten answered no, it would be communicated to the public. Vice Chair Greene cited anytime sales tax is mentioned it is not welcomed, however when people visit McDowell County this generates funding to the County with highlighting it would only be a quarter of a cent. Chairman Brown noted he would support this to deter any kind of property tax increase.

Commissioner Walker suggested the County's award-winning college who has an Article 25, can be used for them. Commissioner Walker brought up the partnership between the school systems and they could utilize the funding for the betterment of the students.

### **Budget Update**

Mr. Wooten went over the property tax report for the month of February, the most recent sales tax report and noted the packets for the FY 2026 budget will go out in the next few weeks. The County Manager spoke on the impact of Hurricane Helene as it relates to the County's tax base, as he and the Tax Assessor will be monitoring this closely, with the breakdown of the remaining ARPA money.

### **Administrative Items**

Mr. Wooten gave the Board the 2 leak requests, EMS write offs, the Trains and Trails Festival request of \$4000.00 and the approval of a reimbursement resolution to purchase a 2026 ambulance. Commissioner Ellis asked what the \$4000.00 goes to for the Trains and Trails Festival, in which the Chairman answered advertising, promotion and materials.

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

### **Board Appointments**

The Clerk to the Board noted there were no applications to approve.

### **Tax Matters**

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

Motor Vehicle Tax Refunds: \$ 1,393.83

Releases over \$100.00: \$ 1,388.68

Releases under \$100.00 \$ 222.02

Refunds: \$ 356.46

Discoveries: \$ 1,770.88

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve tax matters, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Citizens Comments**

Kenneth Wegman spoke on public education; Teri Stohara spoke on DSS building; Gary Burnette spoke on trash; Mike Roland spoke on trash and Neil Schunke spoke on foster care.

### **Commissioners/Staff Reports**

None

### **Closed Session [NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (6)]**

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to go into closed session at 7:12 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 7:54 p.m., with a second by Vice Chairman Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 7:54 p.m., with a second by Commissioner Walker. 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