

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION – June 24, 2025**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Tuesday, June 24, 2025, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

Members Present

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

Members Absent

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Alison Bell, Finance Director ; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

Administrative Items and Budget Update

Mr. Wooten introduced the Cash Flow Loan Program, a unique program that provides money to cities, counties, and school systems that have paid out money for Helene response. The Cash Flow Loan Program provides funds for incurred expenses while waiting for FEMA disbursements. When FEMA disbursements are received, the County would pay back the provided funds to the state. Alison Bell explained that she has heard this program will help with allowing more time for loans to be paid back and tying the loan directly to the FEMA reimbursements. This creates less of a cash flow issue between FEMA disbursements and loans.

Vice-Chair Greene asked what would happen if the County does not get reimbursed by FEMA. Alison Bell stated that in cases like that, the County would need to come up with the funds to pay the loan back. Mr. Wooten added that the County would pay the state back and look for the deficits. Mr. Wooten stated that the majority of the expenditures have a high likelihood of receiving reimbursements from FEMA. Commissioner Walker asked if the loan amount was a set amount or if it was related to what was submitted. Mr. Wooten explained that the loan amount is a percentage of the County's FEMA workbook from three months ago and that it is a recommendation to allow the amendment to go through. Commissioner Walker made

a motion to allow the amendment to move forward as presented and recommended by the county manager, Ashley Wooten, and Finance Director, Alison Bell. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten stated the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has paused PPDR in the county and around 1800 people applied; clean-up has been done via private contractors. A private contractor working to clean up the county has received a message stating that funding approved so far by FEMA for McDowell has been suspended, and stop work orders have been issued. USACE recommends contacting the congressional level to ensure USACE is receiving FEMA money and can continue cleaning up. Commissioner Walker requested information regarding the number of homes in the county that were cleaned up under the PPDR program and how many remain. Chairman Brown requested Mr. Wooten call Mr. Silver regarding this issue and Mr. Wooten stated he would provide an update. Commissioner Walker asked if there were any updates on the parks in McDowell and Mr. Wooten stated that damage assessments on parks are starting to be returned to the Parks and Rec Department. The damage assessments do not include a financial amount, but an RFQ will be sent out for the three most damaged parks for engineering and design.

Mr. Wooten presented Recreational Improvement Project Amendment Four and Budget Amendments to the board. Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve the budget amendments as presented, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

FY 2026 Budget Discussion and Approval

Commissioner Walker asked for the impacts to the budget since the previous budget presentation that commissioners should be made aware of. Mr. Wooten made note of changes to the budget and stated the complete list of changes is included in the packet. Mr. Wooten highlighted that the IBT (Inter Basin Transfer) advocacy effort of twelve thousand dollars was added in, and the America 250 grant was added in a revenue. The property and Liability insurance quote were guestimates in the May 30th presentation; the renewal quote was about thirty thousand more. Also included in the May 30th presentation were two recommended positions: a telecommunicator for 911 and a detective for the Sheriff's Department. The detective position was pulled out of the budget due to Federal Asset funding. Federal Asset Funding requires the need for approval and does not guarantee the funding for the position will be available every year.

Mr. Wooten and Chairman Brown discussed requests for other positions and the ability to review these at a later date if revenues show signs of increase. Vice-Chair Greene asked Mr. Wooten to explain the increases regarding the clerk of court and Mr. Wooten relayed that the increases were related to the jury list maintenance system. Commissioner Walker asked about fund balance percentages for EMS. Mr. Wooten stated if EMS collections are higher than the budget, it goes to fund balance. Mr. Wooten relayed that the trail planner contract position between the County and the Chamber of Commerce has been proactively removed. The contract was yearly and the contract worker is moving to pursue another job opportunity.

Commissioner Ellis asked about quotes received regarding property and liability increases. Mr. Wooten stated that quotes take place every third year. Commissioner Ellis asked if the increases were mainly property or liability. Alison Bell stated the increases were from both liability and property, and that the County suffered a lot of losses this year, along with a high

rate of automobile accidents. Mr. Wooten stated the increase is around thirty thousand dollars from the initial budget presentation and the year-over-year increase is about one hundred thousand (roughly a 17% increase). Mr. Wooten stated general liability was relatively flat, automobile liability increased eighteen thousand, automobile physical damage increased twenty-eight thousand, property damage increased twenty-seven thousand, law enforcement liability increased twelve thousand, and umbrella coverage increased about seven thousand. Commissioner Ellis suggested limitations for County employees who are involved in automobile accidents with major damage (seven thousand dollars or more) in upcoming years. Commissioner Ellis also relayed the rent for the Board of Elections increasing and suggested looking for County-owned properties that can satisfy the needs for that department moving forward.

Commissioner Ellis stated he'd like to leave the nonprofits with no increases due to lost property and to reduce Animal Services special projects due to no explanation of those projects. Ms. Bell stated the increase is for facility maintenance. Mr. Wooten relayed the importance of maintaining the facility to the state's standards. Commissioner Walker explained the appreciation for employee raises and discussed spaying and neutering animals to decrease stray animals in the county. Ms. Bell stated that the adoption expenses (\$20K) is to spay the animals in the shelter and the price of spaying/neutering is equivalent to the adoption fee for that animal when adopted out. Ms. Bell relayed that there is another state program through DSS that is income-based and the County is reimbursed through the Department of Agriculture. Mr. Wooten stated that there is usually a one-hundred percent reimbursement due to the county being tier one.

Commissioner Garner asked if there was a plan for internal pay studies for County departments within the next year and if there was anything to plan for now that would aid in providing an increase in pay for County employees. Mr. Wooten stated he understands and does want to be competitive to keep qualified employees. Mr. Wooten stated that if a pay study is done, the County has to be prepared to act on increases in pay as a two-part commitment. Commissioner Ellis relayed the importance of increases in County revenue to provide raises for County employees and expressed an interest in raising sales tax within the upcoming years to provide money for raises. Chairman Brown and Vice-Chair Greene expressed the importance of reviewing employee pay. Commissioner Garner asked for information on how to bring additional money into the budget for next year. Commissioner Ellis requested more time to review the budget before voting, and the board agreed by consensus.

Adjournment

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 5:57 p.m. with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Madalyn Robinson
Clerk to the Board

Tony Brown
Chairman