

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL SESSION – June 27, 2025**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Friday, June 27, 2025, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

**Members Present**

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

**Members Absent**

Trisha Garner

**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 11:34 a.m.

**Administrative Items and Budget Update**

Mr. Wooten stated that the first item on the agenda was the approval of fireworks shows for the Fourth of July. Commissioner Walker approved fireworks displays, with a second by Chair Brown. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten stated that a project ordinance amendment included in the packet called Project Splice, along with four budget amendments. Project Splice is a small water and sewer grant project. Vice-Chair Greene voted to approve the grant project and budget amendments, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Chair Brown added a request to add an item to the administrative items section. Regarding the tax evaluations, Chair Brown requested the amount spent on bringing in outsider tax assessors. Mr. Wooten stated that the contract with Pearson was over a million dollars. Pearson is performing a full measured list per parcel, so the cost is typical for the scale. Mr. Wooten stated that more real-property appraisers, larger staff, and more expertise regarding industrial and commercial properties would be needed to perform this in-house. Mr. Wooten stated that very few counties of McDowell's size have the level of expertise needed to perform the schedule of values in-house. Chair Brown asked what we could do to bring in qualified tax assessors to the county. Mr. Wooten stated the county would need to pay a lot more money and it is common of counties our size to contract these positions out with county assessors handling

residential appraisal rather than industrial and commercial. There is a difference between commercial and residential tax assessment with commercial and industrial being more technically oriented and challenging. Mr. Wooten stated that the schedule of values is a very important item to have accurate numbers on. Mr. Wooten stated the county did not have the knowledge and expertise to do the more complicated tax assessment matters. Commissioner Walker requested a report by the next monthly meeting from the county tax department regarding the number of revaluations that appealed the board of ENR's decision (as far back as 2019) and what the success ratio was (wins/losses). Ms. Bell stated she would request further back than 2019 to include the company we used before (prior four tax revaluations). Vice-Chair Greene asked how many employees worked for the current contractor and Mr. Wooten stated eight in the field. Vice-Chair Greene asked if this is an area where money spent on training current employees would be beneficial.

Chairman Brown stated that the county is spending an average of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year and asked if we could not educate the employees we have or hire employees who know how to do in-house revaluations for the same amount of money. Mr. Wooten stated that the company provides full measured lists, visiting every property, and receiving more data and corrections than have ever been done. Mr. Wooten stated that there are high labor costs due to this. A full measure list is not performed every four-years, but once a full measure list is complete, the county will assess sales data. The full measured list provides a good reset button. Now that the county has the full measured list data, with three real property appraisers working with Building Inspections, you don't need to hire eight to ten people to perform the full measured list because it's already been performed. Commissioner Greene requested the cost for the current contractor to perform revaluations as requested in the future. Chairman Brown requested the cost to hire someone fully qualified to perform these reviews. Commissioner Ellis stated that for the cost to be accurate for these requests, there needs to be time in between the next meeting to provide an accurate cost. Commissioner Walker requested the cost to hire, what trainings are involved, and how to have someone in-house to perform full-measured revaluations moving forward. Commissioner Walker stated there is ample money provided for training, and the information requested should be provided to allow the commissioners to choose the best option moving forward.

Commissioner Walker requested that the Cadillac at the DSS parking lot be removed by the weekend. Ample time has been provided for the removal of the Cadillac. Chairman Brown asked if Mr. Wooten had contacted the folks involved. Mr. Wooten stated he had sent letters and had not received any contact back from them.

### **FY 2026 Budget Discussion and Approval**

Mr. Wooten stated Ms. Bell went through the budget ordinance and provided a list of changes from the May 30<sup>th</sup> presentation. Commissioner Walker noted that HR activity has been reduced to twenty thousand and asked what the balance in the account. Ms. Bell stated it contains workers' compensation costs and other employee-specific expenditures. Commissioner Walker asked if Sheriff Buchanan understood the changes with his department and Mr. Wooten stated he was aware. The Jail Revenue line item was mentioned as an item of interest since an earlier budget proposal included using this revenue towards General Fund expenditures, but the proposed amount was reduced due to clarification received from Sheriff Buchanan.

Mr. Wooten stated he had a conversation with the Sheriff and they mutually agreed to look into the Jail Revenue. Mr. Wooten stated he suspected money from out-of-county and federal inmates is beneficial to the county, but he wants to do more research into this in order to definitely state that it is in the best interests of the County. Mr. Wooten stated that the Sheriff's Office has been a good steward of the money. Mr. Wooten stated that he has an indication that there will be a request for staff of the Sheriff's Department to grant bonuses out of the Jail Revenue funds to Sheriff's Office staff. Mr. Wooten added that this would need to be approved by Ms. Bell, the Board, and him as an amendment. Commissioner Walker stated the Jail Revenue Fund should be used for equipment and facility upgrades and priorities.

Vice-Chair Greene asked for a report regarding beds reserved for federal inmates and how many are filled quarterly. Alison Bell stated that as far as she is aware, all federal beds are filled. Vice-chair Greene stated that many facility upgrades have been paid for with the Jail Revenue.

Regarding the proposal to use Jail Revenue for bonuses, a set amount bonus was mentioned for staff who worked through Helene and another bonus for staff that did not. Chair Brown stated this was not fair to other staff members who worked through Helene including DSS workers and transportation drivers, and he expressed his opposition to this proposal.. Commissioner Ellis stated that this money comes from General Fund money and they cannot allow departments to make such large requests. Mr. Wooten stated that Sheriff Buchanan might change his mind, but he did not want this information to come out of the blue in case the proposal arrived in the short term.

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve the budget as presented with the changes that have been noted by staff. Seconded by Commissioner Walker

Commissioner Walker proposed that \$10,000 be set aside for spay and neuter in the budget. Commissioner Ellis stated the county should help children out before they help animals out and he is against this. Vice-Chair Greene is against this as well. Chairman Brown stated that he is for this. Commissioner Ellis stated that it is sad to be a Title I county and have children who don't have food. Commissioner Walker requested that the board be open to 5k, and Vice-Chair Greene stated he wouldn't approve this today. Commissioner Ellis stated that all five commissioners should be there for this subject. Mr. Wooten stated that they could look at money that might be available for that specific purpose without affecting county funding (potentially Rotary). Vice-chair Greene stated that Mr. Wooten should look at this in the future, but not make any changes today.

Mr. Wooten noted that there was a motion on the floor to approve the budget. By a vote of 2-2, the motion to approve the budget as presented with the changes noted by staff failed with Vice Chair Greene and Commissioner Ellis voting for the motion and Chairman Brown and Commissioner Walker voting against.

Chairman Brown makes a motion to give \$10,000 to spay and neuter programs and \$10,000 to a children's program. Commissioner Ellis stated he is against this motion; all funding should be used for children in the county. Commissioner Walker has seconded this motion for discussion. By a vote of 2-2, the motion failed With Chairman Brown and Commissioner Walker voting for and Vice Chair Greene and Commissioner Ellis voting against.

Commissioner Walker made a motion for \$10,000 to be identified by staff to be used for a spay and neuter program and discussed at the next possible meeting. Chairman Brown seconded this motion. Mr. Wooten clarified the request for \$10,000 of non-county funds. Commissioner Walker stated he doesn't care where it comes from, \$10,000 to help the spay and neuter problem. By a vote of 3-1, the motion passed with Commissioner Ellis voting against

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to accept the budget vote as presented and the amendments. Seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:10 p.m. with a second by Commissioner Ellis.      Attest:

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Madalyn Robinson  
Clerk to the Board

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Tony Brown  
Chairman