

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
RECESSED SESSION – MAY 18, 2020**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in Recessed Session on Monday, May 18, 2020, at 11:30a.m., at the Universal Conference Room.

Members Present

David N. Walker, Chair; Tony Brown, Vice-Chair-via phone; Barry McPeters; Lynn Greene; Brenda Vaughn

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Cheryl Mitchell, Clerk to the Board; William Kehler, Director ES; Alison Bell, Finance Director, Lisa Sprouse, DSS Director

Call to Order

Chairman Walker called the meeting to order.

DSS Update

Chairman Walker noted the Board appreciated the work of the employees during this pandemic.

DSS Director, Lisa Sprouse reported there had been an increase in domestic violence cases, meth use, and Opioid since the pandemic began in the county. Four children had been placed under DSS care within the last week due to meth use in the home. She also noted it had been harder to get kinship care during this pandemic due to not knowing who the children had been around.

The agency reports were distributed and a copy is with the agenda materials.

COVID-19 Update

Mr. Kehler gave an update from Emergency Services:

- The EOC remains activated at Level 2
- 660 tested; 593 negative; 33 positive; 1 death
- Public Health will be expanding testing
- the percentage of positives versus the total tested shows a slow of the spread; mid April was 8.8% ; currently 4.8%

- continuing to host coordination calls with long term care facilities
- PPE is still coming from the state and FEMA; important to keep long term care in equipment
- EMS calls are continuing to increase over the last several weeks

Mr. Kehler also noted there is a heavy rainfall threat today through Thursday, forecasting 6+ inches of rain for the county. Weather stations have been placed in each community to give the department real time information, due to fluctuations of rain across the county.

Mr. Kehler added this week is EMS Week. He praised his team for their level of commitment not only during this pandemic, but every day.

Chairman Walker asked if the CARES Act funds would pay for testing. Mr. Kehler pointed out that the Health Director is the lead in this pandemic, and the quicker you can identify positives and get them quarantined we can get businesses back open. He added if anyone wanted a test they should call the COVID hotline. The community based testing would go toward reimbursement funds which is CARES Act funding first then FEMA funding.

Mr. Kehler added Atrium is continuing to test; and HCA has one site from 2-4pm if you have doctor's orders or go to the ER.

Mr. Kehler noted the nasal swab test is for active cases, and antibody testing would test if you had ever had the virus. He added the increased testing is showing a downward trend of positives. The EOC is looking at 14-21day trends with the data they are collecting and also monitoring trends in surrounding counties.

Consideration of Resolution

Discussion regarding the Resolution Requesting Local Authority for Covid-19 Response was held.

Following the discussion Commissioner McPeters made a motion to approve the resolution, second by Commissioner Vaughn. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Resolution Requesting Local Authority for Covid-19 Response

WHEREAS, McDowell County, the State of North Carolina, and the United States have been impacted greatly by the spread of the novel Coronavirus and the associated disease now known as COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the McDowell County Board of Commissioners have responded to COVID-19 by declaring a State of Emergency, activating the Emergency Operations Center, and by holding weekly briefings with Emergency Services and Public Health staff; and

WHEREAS, Emergency Services and Public Health have done an excellent job of providing the Board of Commissioners and the general public information regarding COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners have taken steps to ensure the health of the employees of McDowell County Government as well as the residents of McDowell County by adjusting operations of county facilities when warranted; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners have strongly encouraged the people of McDowell County to practice best practices recommended by the Centers for Disease Control including social distancing; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners acknowledge that Governor Roy Cooper has enacted several Executive Orders in response to COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, these Executive Orders have been applied uniformly across the State of North Carolina regardless of county population size or density; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners sent a letter to Governor Cooper on April 21, 2020 requesting that Executive Order 121 be rescinded and that local governments be given authority to decide how to safely reopen their communities; and

WHEREAS, while the Board of Commissioners believe the impacts of the Executive Orders on personal liberty and the local economy have been tremendous; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners acknowledge there has not been a prohibition on worship services in any Executive Order, services are effectively banned due to the maximum gathering limit of ten persons; and

WHEREAS, all churches are afforded their rights under the North Carolina State Constitution in Article 1: Section 13 – Religious Liberty: All persons have a natural and inalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences, and no human authority shall, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners have been contacted by numerous businesses who will struggle to stay in operation if the Executive Orders remain intact.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the McDowell County Board of Commissioners do hereby formally request that Governor Roy Cooper rescind any Executive Order that restricts the ability of local governments to implement appropriate and safe restrictions for their own communities.

Adopted this the 18th day of May, 2020

Attest:

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

David N. Walker, Chairman

Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) Discussion

House Bill 1043/S.L. 2020-4 appropriated \$150 million to be distributed to county governments. McDowell County's portion is \$994,465. All CRF funding will be expended first before using FEMA funds for COVID-10 expenses. Approximately \$220,000 has been spent during this pandemic as of this date. Expenses not in the balance at this time, is the cost of Plexiglas, masks, and other supplies to make offices safe and operational.

General spending plans by the county must be submitted by June 1st, and the funds must be spent by the end of 2020. A recommendation from the staff was to cover COVID-19 expenses of the county, public health and ES. At this time the expenses of both the City of Marion and Town of Old Fort are less than \$20,000.

Consensus from the Board was to accept the staff recommendations.

Dispatching Agreement

A dispatching agreement was adopted in 2011 between the city and the county. The agreement stated the city would pay the cost of two dispatchers. The city currently pays \$118,000; and would like to pay next yr \$80,000; and FY 2022 \$40,000 and then zero in 2023.

The agreement also states the county would pay a portion of the building maintenance, utilities, insurance, etc costs for the space. The cost this year has been \$4,476. In the past major repairs have been made to the building such as repairs to the elevator and the HVAC. The county contributed approximately \$10,000 to those charges.

Discussion followed on possibly moving the 911 Communications Center. Mr. Kehler noted the Center is its own stand alone facility due to security and operations. The current EOC could be implemented with the 911 system, but intense planning would need to be done.

Commissioner Greene made a motion to accept the proposal, second by Commissioner McPeters. Discussion followed on the interlocal agreement and details worked out. A final agreement would be brought back for approval. By a vote of 4-1 the motion passed.

Walker; McPeters; Greene; Vaughn – Yes
Brown – No

Budget Update

Mr. Wooten reviewed anticipated revenue impacts. He noted the sales tax collections on a state wide level was down 5-10% for March, and anticipates April would be lower. Property tax collections are also usually lower in a recession.

He then addressed large expenditure impacts on the budget:

- Local Government Employees Retirement System (LGERS) is requiring an increase to the employer cost for the pension system-\$195,000
- First payment for the EMS building-\$94,000
- local match for the shooting range-\$250,000

- full cost of the tax reappraisal contract- \$128,000
- local match on the Universal Water and Sewer Project- \$117,500
- continued phased increases for the Health District-\$46,987

He also added there would be a three percent water rate increase by the City of Marion.

Vice Chairman Brown added he would like to see employees receive a cost of living adjustment (COLA). Mr. Wooten noted one step adjustment would be \$146,000 for 1.25% increase.

Chairman Walker noted the fund balance is 15.28%.

Ms. Alison Bell noted if the COLA was given in January, the sales tax numbers, property tax values, and collection rates would be in for the first six months of the fiscal year.

Mr. Wooten also presented a list of nonprofit funding request. A recent request from Connect McDowell for \$11,000 for a feasibility study was presented. Discussion followed on which non-profits would have to be cut to fund the study.

Consensus was to approve the request for the study, cut the WNC Communities funding, and staff would adjust the other nonprofit funding accordingly to fund the study.

Adjournment

Commissioner McPeters made a motion to recess at 1:07pm to Monday, June 1st, at 11:30am at the Universal Conference Room, second by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0 the motion passed.

Attest:

Cheryl L. Mitchell
Clerk to the Board

David Walker
Chairman