

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – DECEMBER 1, 2014**

ASSEMBLY

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, December 1, 2014, at 5:00 p.m., Commission Board Room of the County Administration Building, 60 East Court Street, Marion, North Carolina.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Van “Randy” Hollifield; David N. Walker; Barry McPeters; Tony Brown; and Matthew Crawford.

OTHERS PRESENT

Charles R. Abernathy, County Manager; Ashley Wooten, Deputy Clerk to the Board; and Theresa Strickland, Public Information Technician (Filming).

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Hollifield called the meeting to order. The invocation was given by Commissioner McPeters, followed by the pledge of allegiance, led by Commissioner Walker.

Chairman Hollifield recognized the new commissioners and noted that Mr. Walker was reelected to his post.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Crawford made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Walker, to approve the November 10, 2014 Regular Session minutes with the change of location. By unanimous vote, the motion carried.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner McPeters made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Walker, to approve the agenda as presented. By unanimous vote, the motion carried.

SELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Chairman Hollifield nominated Commissioner Walker for the position of Chairman. Mr. Walker thanked Mr. Hollifield for his comments and his service over the past year. There no other nominations for chairman. The vote to approve Commissioner Walker as Chairman was unanimous.

Commissioner Crawford nominated Commissioner McPeters for the position of vice chairman. There were no other nominations. By unanimous approval, Mr. McPeters was confirmed at vice chairman.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

The County Manager provided a brief overview of the various boards and committees that previous and current commissioners have served on over the past year. He noted that Mr. Lavender served on the mental health board, the McDowell House committee, and the tourism development authority. He also noted that Mr. Kaylor served on the health board as well as the senior center advisory committee.

Commissioner McPeters stated he would not be able to serve on the education committee any longer. Mr. Brown agreed to serve on the education committee as well as the senior center advisory committee. Mr. Crawford volunteered to serve on the health board, the TDA, as well as JCPC. Mr. McPeters volunteered to serve on the McDowell House and mental health committees.

BUDGET UPDATE AND FINANCE MATTERS

Mr. Abernathy then presented an update on the county's expenditures and revenues through this point in the fiscal year. He noted for the new commissioners that typically during this item routine finance matters are handled. He provided a sales tax overview for the Board and explained how that revenue works.

The County Manager explained that the school and city funds are sent directly to those entities. He further explained that the sales tax revenue is more difficult to report and track because of the timing of when the revenue is collected and distributed from the state.

Mr. Abernathy also provided an overview of the county's fund balance status as of June 30, 2014. He noted that the total fund balance as of June 30 was \$12,977,514. The available fund balance was \$8,952,373. He noted that the fund balance percentage is 22.84% as of June 30.

Commissioner Hollifield praised staff for the excellent report. Commissioner Crawford also praised the numbers.

The County Manager noted that the audit would be presented at the January meeting. Ms. Morgan noted that the auditors were still waiting on some data from outside agencies.

JAIL AND COURTHOUSE RENOVATION PROJECT PUBLIC HEARING

Chairman Walker declared a public hearing as duly advertised for the purpose of hearing comments from the public on the proposed financing of jail and courthouse improvements.

The County Manager presented an overview of the history of the jail and courthouse renovation project. He noted there was a discrepancy in the estimates and the actual bids, especially on the jail project.

Jack Hemphill of Hemphill-Randel Architects provided an overview of the project and the bids. Mr. Hemphill noted that he and his staff were surprised at the higher than anticipated amount of the jail bids. He noted that to bring the bid price down closer to estimates would involve quite a bit of value engineering. One possibility would be to reduce the number of female beds that could be added at this time. He felt that the courthouse number was fairly accurate based on the lack of variance in the bid amounts.

Mr. Hemphill noted that it would be possible to rebid at a later date with the possibility that the bids could be lower, the same, or higher.

Commissioner Hollifield stated that he felt that removing items from the project would hurt the sheriff's operations. Sheriff Greene addressed the Board and noted that the project as designed would meet current and future needs. Commissioner Crawford noted that he didn't want to shortchange the sheriff by removing capacity from the project.

Sheriff Greene noted that he is housing numerous female inmates in Transylvania County.

Mr. Abernathy noted that if the Board decided to authorize construction of the additional female space, it would increase the cost above \$3 million dollars. Commissioner Hollifield expressed his displeasure with the estimate provided by architect's firms.

Mr. Hemphill agreed that the bids were higher than anyone at his firm expected. He explained that the unique nature of the project might have been the reason for the unexpected costs.

Commissioner Brown discussed the allowances that were put in the bid package. Mr. Hemphill noted that the number could be reduced to some degree, but not much.

The County Manager stated that in order to proceed with the value-engineered bid, the county would need to budget \$90,000 more than anticipated in the next year's budget. The total cost to be financed would be \$2,914,000. With the additional beds, the cost would be \$3,246,000.

When asked for consensus of the Board members, Commissioner Hollifield expressed an interest in rebidding. Commissioner McPeters also expressed reservations with moving forward due to the cost increase. Commissioner Crawford stated that he was OK with the rebid if the complete female project was targeted. Commissioner Brown stated that he would also be interested in rebidding.

A general discussion of proceeding with the rebidding followed.

Commissioner McPeters motioned, with a second by Commissioner Brown, to go out of public hearing. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

The County Manager noted that the bids should be received and rejected. The bids were as follows:

Jail Alterations:	Base Bid:	Alternate:	Base + Alternate:
Blue Ridge Enterprises	\$1,823,000	\$20,000	\$1,863,000
Hickory Construction	\$1,870,000	\$51,000	\$1,921,000
Matthews Construction	\$1,963,000	\$16,900	\$1,979,000
WC Construction	\$2,029,900	\$20,000	\$2,049,900
Wilkie Construction	\$2,042,700	\$34,496	\$2,077,196
HM Kern	\$2,244,000	\$17,500	\$2,261,500

Courthouse Alterations:

Blue Ridge Enterprises	\$976,000
Matthews Construction	\$987,000
Wilkie Construction	\$1,248,878

Commissioner Crawford motioned, with a second by Commissioner Hollifield, to enter the bids into the minutes but reject them. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

RECREATION PLAN PRESENTATION

Recreation Director Susan Huskins presented an overview of the process in developing a recreation comprehensive plan. She stated that numerous meetings were held throughout the community to gauge public input. In addition, she noted that surveys were distributed for residents to submit their recreation preferences.

James Ford of McGill Associates presented an overview of the plan and how he arrived at the recommendations in the plan. Several of the main requests were picnic areas, hiking trails, dog park, indoor swimming pool, multi-sports complex, teen center, and biking trails. He presented some general recommendations concerning maintenance of current facilities and development of additional facilities. Highlights of additional facilities included a community park in Dysartsville as well as enhancing existing facilities.

Commissioner Hollifield commended Mr. Ford for the thoroughness of the document.

The County Manager noted that prioritizing the items in the plan would be necessary in order to decide what might be possible. He recommended posting the document online to receive public comment. He also recommended that the Board approve the plan.

Commissioner Hollifield motioned, with a second by Commissioner McPeters, to approve the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

The County Manager noted that much of this information will be back before the Board during the budget season.

STEM/STEAM PRESENTATION

Melanie Shaver from the McDowell County Public School System presented a new initiative entitled the STEM/STEAM Plan. She introduced several students who have been working under the curriculum. Each student provided an overview of his or her project.

Ms. Shaver presented a request for \$5,000 in order to continue the program. Commissioner Brown expressed his support and appreciation for the project.

Commissioner Hollifield motioned, with a second by Commissioner McPeters, to provide the STEM/STEAM program with \$5,000 in the next budget.

The County Manager noted that this program would hopefully be helpful in increasing the graduation rate.

Commissioner Brown stated that he was excited that Old Fort Elementary was a leading school in the program.

UPDATE ON PART F TRAIL GRANT

The County Manager presented a brief overview of Phase II of project that is currently proceeding towards completion. Regarding Phase III, he reminded the Board that the County had applied in January for funding to construct a trail from Resistoflex Road to the county park. According to Mr. Abernathy, the total cost of that project would have been \$1.2 million.

He noted that the grant requirements had changed and the maximum grant amount had changed to a \$250,000 grant with a one for one match. He provided several options for the possible routing of the trail and length.

He noted that the public comment meeting and the adoption of the comprehensive recreation plan would help with the public component. Mr. Wooten noted that the countywide greenway plan would be updated and presented at the January meeting for approval.

UNIVERSAL UPDATE

Mr. Abernathy noted that finishing touches are still being applied to the Universal building. He said county staff had been working with the college to finish everything that remains to be completed. He noted there would be one final project budget amendment for final costs.

He also discussed the \$1.5 million grant (plus \$300,000 match) that would be submitted to cover the grading of sites and the equipping of the Universal Center for a four-year program. He stated that \$250,000 of that cost would be the equipment cost with the balance being the grading of potential building sites. He said he had been working hard behind the scenes to secure support from local industries and the school system for the engineering program. He stated that the interest had been quite high so far.

He stated his opinion would be to move forward with the engineering program if the grant were not successful and wait on the grading.

FOOTHILLS PILOT PLANT UPDATE

The County Manager provided a brief update on the history of the Foothills Pilot Plant project. He noted that there had been a consensus on transferring the operation and equipment from the McDowell Economic Development Association to the Independent Small Animal Meat Producers Association.

Mr. Abernathy suggested the County retain the property and building and transferring everything else.

Commissioner Hollifield suggested starting with a short-term lease of the property with the eventual goal of transferring the property once it has been determined that the operation would be successful.

Commissioner McPeters stated he had initially had been in favor of a complete transfer. He said he could see where a lease would be a good idea as well.

Commissioner Brown stated he preferred to completely transfer the operation and property.

Commissioner Crawford motioned, with a second by Commissioner Hollifield, to enter into a three-year lease with ISAMPA, as well as transferring the equipment and operation to the nonprofit. After a brief discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

UPDATE ON CROOKED CREEK CONVENIENCE CENTER

The County Manager presented an update on the activity that has taken place on the Crooked Creek Convenience Center site since the last meeting. He noted that Mike Gladden had working on cost estimates for the work that would be needed to be done.

He noted in order to proceed with obtaining a survey of the property; he noted that the Board must waive the requirements of the "Mini-Brooks" Act.

Commissioner Hollifield motioned, with a second by Commissioner Crawford, to authorize the waiver of the "Mini-Brooks" Act. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

UPDATE ON THEATER RECRUITMENT

Mr. Abernathy noted there had been an ongoing effort to work with a movie theater recruiter to bring a movie theater to the community. He stated that the county had provided funds previously for a phase 1 evaluation of the community. The consultant had stated that he felt the community could support a cinema. The phase 2 of the project would be to start the active recruitment and/or development of the project.

WATER SYSTEM UPDATE

Mr. Abernathy noted that there had been little movement on the water line grant for the I-40 Interchange project. He stated that a \$300,000 grant was awaiting approval in Washington, with a \$100,000 state grant that had been approved.

He also provided an update on the reclassification process. He informed the board that the reclassification process is very complicated and can be difficult to understand. He said he hoped to have a workshop with the county's engineer in the next few months in order to catch the board up on where the process stands.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Wooten provided an overview of the board appointments for the month. He noted that there are two planning board alternate vacancies that continue to be advertised.

TAX MATTERS

The County Manager presented the monthly tax releases, rebills, and refunds.

A summary of the tax matters:

Releases Under \$100.00	Released amount of \$15.55
Releases Over \$100.00	Released amount of \$396.80

The NCVTS Pending Refund report showed a refund total of \$1,115.42.

Commissioner McPeters motioned, with a second by Commissioner Crawford, to approve the releases, rebills, and refunds. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

LEGISLATIVE GOALS CONFERENCE DELEGATE

Chairman Walker noted that the county would need to appoint a delegate to the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Legislative Goals Conference. Commissioner Hollifield expressed a desire to remain as the delegate since he is currently serving on several NCACC committees.

Commissioner Brown motioned, with a second by Commissioner McPeters, to appoint Commissioner Hollifield as the county's voting delegate at the Legislative Goals Conference. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE

The County Manager provided the Board an overview of the Christmas holiday schedule. He noted that the county offices will be closed for three days at Christmas in order to match up with the state holiday schedule. He did note the convenience centers are open through noon on Christmas Eve, closed on Christmas, and will be open the day after Christmas.

He did note that emergency service personnel are working throughout the holidays.

CITIZEN COMMENT

No one from the public requested to speak.

REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

The County Manager presented a brief list of upcoming meetings.

The Chairman also invited each commissioner to say several words of greeting for Christmas. At the conclusion of the greetings, Commissioner McPeters read the Christmas story from the Books of Matthew and Luke.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to transact at this time, upon motion by Commissioner McPeters and a second by Commissioner Brown, the meeting was adjourned.

DAVID N. WALKER
CHAIRMAN

ASHLEY R. WOOTEN
DEPUTY CLERK TO THE BOARD