

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – SEPTEMBER 8, 2014**

ASSEMBLY

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, September 8, 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, Chairman; Joseph R. Kaylor, Vice-Chairman; Michael K. Lavender; and Barry E. McPeters.

OTHERS PRESENT

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

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Kaylor made a motion, seconded by Commissioner McPeters, to approve the August 11, 2014 Regular Session as presented. By unanimous vote, the motion carried.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Chairman indicated that Item E – Request from Pilot Club would not be on the agenda.

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

EMPLOYEE CHOICE AWARDS

The County Manager informed the board that The McDowell News annually holds a “Best Of” competition for various businesses, organizations, and groups. He mentioned that two county employees were voted as best county employee and best paramedic. The two employees are Sam Robinson for McDowell EMS and Chad Ray with NC Cooperative Extension.

Mr. Hollifield presented Mr. Ray with his certificate of recognition (Mr. Robinson could not be present due to training.)

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM UPDATE

The County Manager provided a recap of the afterschool program that is underway at the recreation center. He noted that the program is primarily for 6-8 graders. He noted that enrollment has been low at this time, but hoped that the interest would continue to grow.

Recreation Director Susan Huskins presented an update on the program and presented several of the enrollees. She stated that there are currently five students enrolled in the program. She stated that the youth have proposed to name the program PEAK (Physical Activities, Education, Awesome Fun, Knowing your community).

Kenan Todd, Garrett Shepherd, Aiden Gibb, each presented a summary of what they liked best about the program.

A general discussion followed concerning the benefits of the program and methods of increasing the awareness of the program.

Regarding the name of the program, the consensus of the Board was to allow the participants to name the program PEAK.

The Board thanked the participants for attending the meeting

BUDGET UPDATE AND FINANCE MATTERS

The County Manager noted a request from the Finance Office to waive a late fee for an occupancy tax payment.

Commissioner Lavender motioned, with a second by Commissioner Kaylor, to approve the waive of the occupancy tax late fee. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

Mr. Abernathy then presented an update on the county's expenditures and revenues through this point in the fiscal year, and the close out of the prior fiscal year. He advised that the most recent sales tax figures are looking positive for the closeout of the previous year. He stated that other revenues look good at this point as well.

REQUEST CONCERNING STATE LIBRARY AID

Library Director Elizabeth House presented an update on the activities of the library. She noted that visitation rates are up across the board. She stated that a great addition to the library's offerings is the consortium that allows patrons to check out books from various libraries in the region and throughout the state.

Ms. House stated that her primary purpose in appearing before the Board was to inform them that State Aid to Libraries continues to be reduced, with a large cut occurring

over the past ten years. Libraries throughout the state are asking for funding levels to return to the 2011 levels.

She noted the county library currently receives around \$100,000 from the state and a reduction of that amount would be detrimental to her department.

Commissioner Lavender motioned, with a second by Commissioner McPeters, to approve this request as a Legislative Goal to be presented to the Legislative Goals Conference held by the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

UPDATE ON TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

The County Manager provided a brief update on the transportation planning process. He informed the Board that the state has received the county's interest and are planning to move ahead with the planning.

Mr. Abernathy stated that a private consulting firm will be hired by December at which time the consultant will visit McDowell County and begin to meet with local stakeholders. He felt that the consultant's investigation would be very comprehensive. He said that there would be public meetings and likely a survey that would be distributed. The primary goal of the study would be to identify the need that exists for additional transportation options in the community. The total cost to the county would be around \$9,000.

Commissioner Lavender expressed a desire that a broad effort at surveying be made to reach as many folks as possible. Mr. Abernathy agreed and stated that he felt that the study would only be helpful if people that need the service make their needs known.

JAIL PROJECT UPDATE

The County Manager stated that the County had received approval from the state to move forward with the renovation of the jail. He advised that there are several steps that must take place before bids can be awarded. The county is aiming for an approval of financing at the January meeting of the Local Government Commission. In order to meet that date, the county must follow several steps including the approval of the annual audit, a public hearing, and advertising and selecting of bids.

UNIVERSAL PROJECT UPDATE

Mr. Abernathy advised that the target for substantial completion for the Universal center was early October. The ribbon cutting date is penciled in for October 23, with the hope that the governor will be the keynote speaker.

He stated that the signage is being installed as well as many of the other finishing touches.

BROADBAND UPDATE

The County Manager encouraged residents to complete the broadband survey, which can be found at the Public Library, or online at ncbroadband.com. The survey will help determine where there is lack of service or where service is poor. He stated there had been about 500 responses so far. He noted that the survey period closes at the end of October.

Commissioner Lavender presented several ideas of methods of spreading the word of the survey.

SOIL CONSERVATION OFFICE SPACE REQUEST

Chairman of the Soil and Water Conservation Board Terry English spoke on behalf of his Board in requesting that if the Commissioners would allow his staff to transfer to the McDowell Economic Development Association (MEDA) building once the space is made available. Mr. Abernathy noted that the plan is for the MEDA staff to move to the Universal Building.

Mr. Abernathy stated that EMS would still need to use the MEDA building periodically for training and Soil and Water staff had no problem with that use.

Commissioner Kaylor motioned, with a second by Commissioner Lavender, to approve the use of the MEDA building by the Soil and Water Conservation staff. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

Mr. English also thanked the Board for increasing the watershed maintenance budget. He noted that the county

WATERLINE GRANT

Mr. Wooten provided the Board an update on the status of the waterline grants that would pay for the extension of county water to the Exit 90 Interchange. He advised that the Appalachian Regional Commission Grant had been approved at the state level and was now awaiting approval in Washington, DC. The Rural Economic Development Division grant had been submitted, with a decision anticipated in October.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Wooten provided an overview of the board appointments for the month. Lisa Sprouse had requested to be appointed to the Transportation Planning Board in the designated DSS director spot. He also noted that Gwen McNeely had applied for the Nursing Home Advisory Committee and Mary Van Dyke had applied for the Library Board of Trustees.

Commissioner Lavender motioned, with a second by Commissioner McPeters, to approve appointment of Ms. Sprouse, Ms. McNeely, and Ms. Van Dyke to their respective boards. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

TAX MATTERS

The County Manager presented the monthly tax releases, rebills, and refunds. He reviewed the memo with the Board addressing some of the concerns raised at the July meeting. He also noted one taxpayer who had several large releases due to a forestry program that had been put into place.

A summary of the tax matters:

Releases Under \$100.00	Released amount of \$2,866.30
Releases Over \$100.00	Released amount of \$67,021.54
Motor Vehicle Releases Under \$100.00	Released amount of \$44.63
Motor Vehicle Releases Over \$100.00	Released amount of \$101.42
Release Refunds	Refunded amount of \$3,528.32

The NCVTS Pending Refund report showed a refund total of \$2,463.57.

Comissioner McPeters did note that he had a family member listed on the vehicle releases. Mr. Abernathy stated that he felt it was OK for Mr. McPeters to vote as long as he did not receive a direct financial benefit.

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

FOOTHILLS PILOT PLANT DISCUSSION

Mr. Abernathy provided the Board a summary of the Foothills Pilot Plant small animal processing facility. He noted that the facility is operated by MEDA.

A group of producers called the Independent Small Animal Meat Producers Association (ISAMPA) has asked for the facility to be transferred to their ownership and control.

Chairman Hollifield expressed a desire for there to be more local and regional producers that utilize the facility. Mr. Abernathy agreed and noted that many of utilizers were from out of state.

A general discussion of the future of the plant was discussed by the Board, including the possibility of the new school program being involved in the plant.

GOLDEN LEAF GRANT OPPORTUNITY

The County Manager stated that the Golden Leaf Foundation has announced a new grant program that would be tied to job creation. The maximum per county would be \$1.5 million per county. It is similar to the Community Assistance Initiative that is currently paying for the Universal training center.

He discussed several grant concepts that have been discussed including the possibility of recruiting an engineering program to the county from Western Carolina University. Other ideas could include the expansion of high school training programs. Other concepts could include grading some industrial sites on the Universal property, building the road to the Ashworth Road site, or other similar ideas.

Mr. Abernathy said he felt the Western Carolina proposal would be the concept with the most “excitement” from the Golden Leaf staff.

Commissioner McPeters stated that he felt that expanding education opportunities for local students would help the employers in the county.

Mr. Abernathy encouraged the Board to think over the next weeks about possible projects for future consideration.

HOSPITAL – SENIOR CENTER LEASE SPACE

Mr. Abernathy reviewed the current situation regarding the lease space at the Senior Center in Marion. He advised that the hospital lease is expiring in October. He presented a lease renewal for five years with 2.5% higher than the current term.

Commissioner McPeters motioned, with a second by Commissioner Kaylor, to approve the lease renewal as presented. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

RENEWAL OF TILSON MACHINE LEASE AT UNIVERSAL BUILDING

The County Manager presented the lease renewal for Tilson Machine for a nine-year term at \$2 a square foot rate.

Commissioner Kaylor motioned, with a second by Commissioner McPeters to approve the lease renewal as presented. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

REQUEST BY FIRE DEPARTMENT TO USE HENDRIX FARM

Mr. Abernathy presented a request by the Nebo Fire Department to do some training on the property. The department would eventually like to burn the two smaller homes on the property.

Commissioner McPeters motioned, with a second by Commissioner Lavender, to approve the use of the Hendrix property for training. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

On a related note, Mr. Abernathy asked the Board to think about holding a workshop in mid November to discuss the water treatment plant property and the permitting process.

CITIZEN COMMENT

No one from the public requested to speak.

REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

There were no reports of note.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to transact at this time, upon motion by Commissioner Lavender and a second by Commissioner Kaylor, the meeting was adjourned to Monday, October 13, 2014 at 4 pm at the Historic Carson House.

VAN RANDY HOLLIFIELD
CHAIRMAN

ASHLEY R. WOOTEN
DEPUTY CLERK TO THE BOARD