

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – FEBRUARY 10, 2014**

ASSEMBLY

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, February 10, 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; Joseph R. Kaylor; David N. Walker; Barry E. McPeters; and Michael K. Lavender.

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 Commissioner Walker.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

McDOWELL LEGACY PROJECT SECOND PREMIERE

Chairman Hollifield recognized the director of the Senior Center, Weyland Prebor. Mr. Prebor was present to invite the commissioners and the public to the second premier of McDowell Legacy Project. Mr. Prebor and Ms. Strickland have been working for several months on interviews with senior citizens.

Mr. Prebor presented a sample video featuring Mr. Robert Gourley. At the conclusion of the video, Mr. Prebor invited each Board member to the event on February 27th at the Senior Center.

Commissioner Walker asked about the length of each interview. Mr. Prebor said the interview subject set the limit. Chairman Hollifield asked if every participant would be invited, which Mr. Prebor confirmed that was case.

Chairman Hollifield asked how the participants were selected. Mr. Prebor said that members of the community submit names. Commissioner Walker said he thought it was a wonderful way for young people and senior citizens to connect and to learn from each other.

BUDGET AMENDMENTS, RESOLUTIONS AND WRITE-OFFS

The County Manager presented a mid-year update on the county's fiscal situation. He presented an overview of the county's primary revenues, including property and sales taxes. He said the current trend was there to be an overage in property tax collections. He reported that the sales tax is \$107,834 in the black through four months. Register of Deeds and Building Inspection fees are up at this point in the year, which the County Manager said was good indicator for the local economy. He did point out that through the end of January \$727,000 had been budgeted from the fund balance.

Chairman Hollifield asked for the County Manager's frank assessment of the county's situation. Mr. Abernathy said he felt good with the financial situation at this point.

The County Manager and Finance Officer presented the following budget amendments for the Board's approval:

GF 29 - This amendment increases the fuel maintenance line item from existing expenditure line items and from tax interest to cover significant repairs to the dumpster truck.

GF 30 - Allocates grant funding received at the Library for equipment and computer related items.

GF 31 - The line item transfers funds within the Sheriff's Department.

GF 32 - This amendment appropriates additional grant funding received for the McDowell House archeological study that has been done.

GF 33 - This amendment transfers funds from the Water/Sewer Improvement Line Item to the Lake James Project Fund. This covers the purchase of the property.

LJA1 - This is the Project Fund of Amendment GF 33.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Lavender, to approve budget amendments GF 29-33, and LJA1. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

The Finance Officer presented several uncollectable EMS accounts for write-off. Commissioner Walker made a motion, seconded by Commissioner McPeters, to approve the write-offs as presented. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

FINANCING FOR CONTAINER TRUCK

The County Manager informed the Board that they have previously approved the purchase of a container truck and now they are being asked to approve the financing package.

BB&T presented the lowest bid of 1.56% over four years with semiannual payments. Other bids received include SunTrust Bank at 1.6% and Capital Bank at 2.17%. PNC Bank and Wells Fargo responded with unfavorable terms with no responses from Bank of America, Fifth Third, and First Citizens.

Commissioner McPeters asked about the obsolete trucks. The County Manager informed him that once they were now longer usable, they were sold on an auction website.

Commissioner Walker motioned to approve the resolution and the low bid as presented with a second by Commissioner Lavender. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

ADVERTISING FOR DELINQUENT TAXES

Tax Collector Linda Onufrey presented the delinquent list to the Board and the advertising proposal. The quote to advertise the delinquent list was \$4,472.50 from *The McDowell News*. She requested that the advertisement run in the May 14, 2014 edition.

The County Manager gave a brief overview of the statutory requirement of advertisement delinquent real property taxes. He reminded the Board that the advertisement cost is passed on to the taxpayer.

Commissioner Lavender made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Kaylor, to authorize the advertisement of the delinquent taxes in *The McDowell News* on May 14 at the quote they presented. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

EMS STORM UPDATE / AMBULANCE / VEHICLE BID RELEASE

EMS Director William Kehler gave the Board an update on the impending winter storm that was due to impact McDowell County. He said that his staff was monitoring the situation and were in constant contact with facilities throughout the county that may be adversely affected by a significant winter event.

The County Manager thanked Mr. Kehler for their preparation and informed the Board that a large area of concern was Old Fort Mountain and disabled vehicles. Mr. Kehler said the EMS staff would be dispersed throughout the county.

Mr. Kehler presented an overview of the usual ambulance bid process. He said they would prefer to do a different approach this year. He said they would prefer to take an ambulance box off an older unit and transfer it to a new truck. He said he would like to use the savings from remounting a box to purchase two new administrative vehicles that are 15 years old.

The County Manager asked how many remounts that are currently in the fleet of eight trucks. Mr. Kehler said the last remount was done in 2007. He said the box that would be remounted is in excellent shape and should handle the transfer well. The box would be mounted on a GM vehicle.

Commissioner Walker commended Mr. Kehler for his creative approach for saving the county funds. Chairman Hollifield echoed the comment. Mr. Kehler said the administrative vehicles should last 8-10 years.

Commissioner Lavender made a motion, with a second by Commissioner Kaylor, to purchase the GM vehicle and the two administrative vehicles as presented by Mr. Kehler. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

RECREATION AND KBR UPDATE

Recreation Director Susan Huskins presented an update on the ongoing renovations at the McDowell Recreation Center on Academy Street in Marion. She said the gym has been painted and the floor work should begin within the next week. She plans to have a ribbon cutting in mid March. The additional equipment including basketball goals, volleyball equipment, and bleachers will be installed at the end of the project. The lobby is also being repainted as well to match the gym. She will attempt to locate funding to replace the lobby floor as well.

She requested that the Board approve additional funds in the current fiscal year to allow her to hire a gym supervisor once the renovations are complete.

The County Manager reminded the Board that as a condition of the Kate B. Reynolds grant that the county would create additional programming. He felt that hiring of the person sooner would be a show of good faith with the foundation.

Commissioner Kaylor asked about the lighting. Ms. Huskins said that the lights were not to be replaced as part of this project, but she would monitor the brightness after the new floor is installed.

The County Manager asked Ms. Huskins and Mr. Wooten to investigate new lighting options for the facility. Commissioner McPeters suggested that the lobby floor be replaced now. The County Manager said staff would investigate funding alternatives to help pay for the floor.

Commissioner Kaylor made a motion, with a second by Commissioner Walker, to authorize the hiring of the gym supervisor and to install a new floor in the lobby. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

Ms. Huskins provided an update on the Old Fort renovations and provided an overview of the master planning process that is being handled by McGill Associates.

She also informed the Board that she would be forming a Relay for Life team for the McDowell County organization. She is putting together a steering committee to help develop fundraisers. She has secured a dunking booth for the event. Another fundraising idea is to have a walkathon that would be open to county employees.

Ms. Huskins stated the funding support from the KBR Charitable Trust has been a great development for her department.

CDBG PUBLIC HEARING / INTERSTATE 40 WATER PROJECT

Chairman Hollifield declared the Board in public hearing for the purpose of receiving comments for a proposed CDBG grant. He recognized the County Manager and asked Mr. Abernathy to explain the purpose of the hearing.

The County Manager presented an overview of the proposed project, which would extend water lines to the Interstate 40 Exit 90 area. According to Mr. Abernathy there are several businesses in the area that would be able to expand in the area if water service were available. There are approximately 30 jobs that may be created. He said the two grant sources that would be evaluated are CDBG and Rural Economic Division.

He presented the estimates prepared by the engineer showing that the cost to extend a line from the “caboose” on Harmony Grove Road to the interchange was \$582,810 and extending a line down Stacy Hill Road to the aforementioned line would cost \$934,950.

Commissioner Lavender said he thought the extension would be very appreciated by property owners at the interchange area. He also said he would hope that the extension could happen along Stacy Hill Road as soon as possible.

The County Manager said that staff would continue to search for sources of funds to run lines along Stacy Hill Road and other roads.

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

The County Manager asked for the Board to approve moving forward with the submission of a grant to extend the water line down Harmony Grove Road.

Commissioner Walker made a motion, with a second by Commissioner Lavender, to apply for a grant that would help pay for the extension of the water line from the “caboose” to the interchange area. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

Commissioner Lavender asked that the staff continue to look for funding for Stacy Hill Road in particular. The County Manager said staff would prepare estimates for Stacy Hill and other roads and would bring them back to the Board.

SOIL AND WATER PRESENTATION

McDowell Soil and Water District Technician Tyler Ross was present to update the Board on recent activities of the District and their mission. He presented an overview of each of the programs that the staff works on independently and with the assistance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

He said a large concern of the district is the Muddy Creek Watershed maintenance of the dams. A recent problem area was the Lemon Tree Structure. He said there would be a tour of all of the Muddy Creek structures on February 25 at 9 AM.

Commissioner Walker asked Mr. Ross to give a quick overview of the Muddy Creek Watershed structures. Mr. Ross explained that the structures were built to protect the down creek property owners from flooding events. The County Manager reiterated that these structures are important to the safety of folks in these communities.

Mr. Ross also gave a brief overview of the governance of the District. Chairman Hollifield thanked Mr. Ross for the work he and the District staff do to keep people safe in the community.

FACILITY BASED CRISIS CENTER

Genny Pugh of the Smoky Mountain Center was present to discuss a proposal to establish a Facility Based Crisis Center to serve Alexander, Caldwell, and McDowell counties. She said this facility would be designed to serve individuals that have mental and behaviorial health issues that could be treated in such a facility.

She stated that Caldwell County owns a building that could be added on for this facility. The total cost of the project is approximately \$1.2 million. Caldwell has pledged to contribute a significant share and is asking for Alexander and McDowell to contribute in the range of \$50,000 to \$75,000.

Ms. Pugh stated the facility would remove a large burden from the emergency departments in the three counties, which would free up space for medical emergencies. She added an additional benefit would be that the facility would free up law enforcement officers since they often must stay with patients at hospitals.

Chairman Hollifield asked when construction could start. Ms. Pugh said under a best-case scenario, it would be a two-year process for the facility to be in operation. He also asked why Caldwell was chosen. Ms. Pugh explained the criteria as to why Caldwell was the lead county, which primarily was due to the large amount of individuals that were using the emergency department in that county.

In response to a question by Mr. McPeters, Ms. Pugh explained the complex requirements of the building, which primarily focus on security.

Commissioner Lavender followed up to Ms. Pugh's comments and stated that it is possible that McDowell County could be asked to help provide security funding once the facility is in operation. He also provided additional details as to why Caldwell was chosen. He stated that there was little interest from other counties due to the onerous requirements of the financing. He added that Caldwell would be paying \$100,000-\$150,000 towards the cost of the project.

Commissioner Lavender stated that it is possible that there may be funds available for this project from the sale of buildings formerly owned by Foothills Area Mental Health. He added that he felt it was the thing to do to build this facility.

Commissioner Kaylor asked if state or federal funding was available. Ms. Pugh pointed out that the NC Housing Finance funding of \$600,000 is federal funds. The operating costs would be paid for with federal and state dollars. Chairman Hollifield said he was concerned about future ongoing costs to provide security for the facility. Ms. Pugh said that she felt the costs would be offset by the benefit to the McDowell County Sheriff's Office.

Commissioner Walker said he was concerned that there was very little time to consider the proposal if she needed answer by February 28, 2014. He asked if the facility in Buncombe County was open to use by McDowell County residents. She stated that the Buncombe facility is primarily for Buncombe and counties to the west. He also asked if Caldwell would have priority over McDowell residents. Ms. Pugh stated the counties would be equal for space consideration regardless of funding. Ms. Pugh stated that the staffing would be in the range of 15-20 persons.

Commissioner Walker stated another concern that the facility would be opened up to individuals outside the region. Commissioner Lavender stated there would be a limit to the number of beds that would be made available to persons from outside the region.

Ms. Pugh stated in response to Commissioner Kaylor's question that staff could be drawn from all three counties. Commissioner McPeters asked several questions regarding how to help individuals that frequently utilize services. Ms. Pugh stated that it is a challenge statewide dealing with individuals that are frequent users of the system. She said the preference is to treat individuals in their local communities and to prevent them from entering long-term care at a state hospital.

Chairman Hollifield asked when the funds would be needed. Commissioner Lavender stated that the funds would be required in the 2014-15 fiscal year.

The County Manager asked several questions including how many individuals would be served, how many dollars would be saved, and if the sale proceeds from the former Foothills buildings could be designated for this project. He also asked if the funding request depended on the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust grant request, which Ms. Pugh stated the request would be \$50,000 if the grant were awarded and \$75,000 if the grant were not awarded.

Ms. Pugh stated that in 2013 there were 882 mental individuals that utilized the emergency department at McDowell Hospital. She felt that the hospital staff would very pleased if the facility was built in order to reduce the burden on their operations.

Commissioner Walker said he had concerns with moving forward tonight with the information that has been presented. The County Manager suggested considering the request at the March meeting with more information in hand with possibly providing \$25,000 over two years.

Commissioner Lavender stated that he felt there was adequate information in hand to proceed with a commitment at tonight’s meeting. Commissioner Kaylor asked who would be responsible for the transport cost to the facility in Lenoir. Ms. Pugh stated that by law the county would be responsible for the transport.

Commissioner McPeters also expressed support for the project, but he felt that the Board needed additional time and information to make a decision.

Commissioner Lavender made a motion to provide a letter of commitment for the facility based crisis center at the amount of \$50,000-75,000 depending on the availability of grant funds, and with the assumption that Caldwell and Alexander counties. The motion died due to the lack of a second.

Commissioner Kaylor made a motion, with a second by Commissioner Walker, to table the discussion until the March meeting. By a 4-1 vote, the motion passed with the following votes:

<i>AYES:</i>	Hollifield Kaylor McPeters Walker	<i>NOES:</i>	Lavender
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Commissioner Lavender made a motion, with a second by Commissioner McPeters, to provide a letter of support for the project stating the facility is needed. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

PARTF TRAIL GRANT UPDATE

The County Manager informed the Board that the county had submitted the application for the Catawba River Greenway Phase III PARTF grant. The final project is designed to run from Resistoflex Road to the county river park property. The length is approximately one mile at a cost of \$1,262,889. Several of the funding sources are pending. The City of Marion has not committed to a contribution amount. There may be a county match of up to \$750,000 depending on participation from other sources.

McDOWELL HOUSE UPDATE

The County Manager mentioned that the Board had previously committed to a \$5,000 contribution to match National Park Service funds. Phase II of the river greenway will end at the rear of the property and will include a parking lot and amphitheater.

The pressing issue for the county at this point is that the lender on the property has not given permission to remove the wings on the house. Mr. Abernathy stated that staff would continue to press the lender for permission to perform the demolition work.

GENERAL GRANT UPDATE

The County Manager presented an overview of ongoing grant activity. He presented the information to inform the Board of the broad number of grants that involve the county. He stated these grants could be quite involved in preparation and implementation.

He had spoken with the county's grantwriter Mark Goldstein who has worked on four grant applications this fiscal year. Two have been awarded and two are pending.

TAX MATTERS

The monthly listing of tax releases and refunds were presented for the Board's approval. In summary they were:

Releases Under \$100.00	Released amount of \$448.63
Releases Over \$100.00	Released amount of \$4,490.82
Motor Vehicle Releases Under \$100.00	Released amount of \$178.42
Release Refunds	Refunded amount of \$184.79

The NCVTS Pending Refund report showed a refund total of \$1,687.73.

Commissioner McPeters made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Walker, to approve the tax releases and refunds as presented. By unanimous approval, the motion carried.

BROADBAND INVENTORY GRANT

The County Manager stated the State of North Carolina would perform an inventory of the broadband availability in McDowell County. No county money is involved. The Board was supportive of the project.

CITIZEN COMMENT

Chairman Hollifield asked if any one present would like to speak at this time. No one responded.

ADJOURNMENT

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

VAN RANDY HOLLIFIELD
CHAIRMAN

ASHLEY R. WOOTEN
DEPUTY CLERK TO THE BOARD