

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING – JUNE 1, 2015**

ASSEMBLY

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in adjourned session on Monday, June 1, 2015, at 4 p.m., Commission Board Room of the County Administration Building, 60 East Court Street, Marion, North Carolina.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

OTHERS PRESENT

Ashley Wooten, Assistant to the County Manager; Alison Morgan, Finance Officer; William Kehler, Emergency Services Director; Craig Walker, Deputy Emergency Services Director; and Michael Conley, reporter for *The McDowell News*.

CALL TO ORDER

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

BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

The Chairman recognized Mr. Wooten and asked him to review the budget process.

Mr. Wooten noted that the budget ordinance was prepared over several months after meeting with department head and several outside agencies. He also noted that the public hearing had been advertised in *The McDowell News* as required by NC General Statute 159-12 and a draft ordinance has been available for public inspection in the Finance Office.

The Chairman then declared the meeting to be in public hearing for the purpose of receiving comments on the proposed FY 2016 budget.

Jeff Banks of North Cove presented a petition from residents of the North Cove area who were opposed to the fire tax increase and the hiring of a staff member for the Ashford-North Cove Fire Department.

Billy Reel of North Cove also spoke against the tax increase. He stated that he felt the department could operate without the increase.

Bobby Hilton of North Cove spoke against the purchase of a ladder truck by the department. He stated that he felt a smaller truck would have been more appropriate. Mr. Hilton also stated that he felt that the two-cent increase was excessive based on the amount of funds in the organization's budget.

Joe Quinn of North Cove stated that he was opposed to a paid person due to the fact that he felt that there is not need for position.

Chief Brad Washburn of Ashford-North Cove stated that they are requesting the paid person due the need to make sure calls are answered at all hours. He noted that most of the department volunteers worked during the day and were unable to answer calls many times. He defended the department's actions in purchasing equipment stating that the equipment would help meet rating requirements of the state.

Commissioner McPeters motioned, with a second by Commissioner Crawford, to go out of public hearing. Commissioner Brown asked for some clarification on the petition initiated by Mr. Banks. He also asked the fire department about their discussions with Baxter Healthcare.

The Chairman asked county staff for information fire department fund balances. He also several follow-up questions about staffing at the volunteer fire departments throughout the county. Chairman Walker also asked about ISO ratings. Mr. Kehler and Mr. Walker explained about the ISO rating process. The Ashford-North Cove fire chief noted that their goal was to go to a 7 rating from the current 9S.

A general discussion of the rating process and its impact followed.

Chairman Walker noted that there was still a motion on the floor and a second. He addressed several of the concerns that had been expressed by the North Cove residents. He noted that Board was concerned about many of the issues, but he stated that he felt the department was working to make amends for past mistakes by others.

Terry English of the North Cove community requested that the tax increase be postponed until more information about the financial state of the department was determined.

Commissioner Hollifield stated due to some of the questions raised he would prefer that the vote not take place today.

Commissioner Brown stated that he felt that the improvement of the ISO rating would help "pay for" the tax increase. Mr. Banks stated he felt that waiting one year would help to bring the community together and would make a tax increase more palatable after a year.

Commissioner McPeters expressed some of the same concerns that had expressed by other Board members. He acknowledged that the timing of request might not be the best. He also encouraged the fire department to discuss needs with the community.

A general discussion of the increase followed.

The vote to approve going out of public hearing passed unanimously.

The Chairman noted that there was not support for approving the budget and asked for a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

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

DAVID N. WALKER
CHAIRMAN

ASHLEY R. WOOTEN
DEPUTY CLERK TO THE BOARD