

Draft

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING**     January 4, 2021

**ALEXANDER COUNTY**  
**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

**PRESENT:**    Larry Yoder, Chairman  
                  Ronnie Reese, Vice-Chairman  
                  Josh Lail  
                  Dr. Jeff Peal  
                  Marty Pennell

**STAFF:**        Rick French, County Manager

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, January 4, 2021, in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Yoder called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Vice-Chairman Reese gave the invocation and Commissioner Pennell led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**\*\*\*SPECIAL RECOGNITION\*\*\***

Allison Brown, who recently accepted the position of Alexander County Extension Director, conveyed her appreciation to the Board for their confidence, noting that she looked forward to continuing her working relationship with Extension staff and providing quality services and programs to the citizens of Alexander County.

The Board also thanked Nancy Keith who served as Interim Extension Director after the retirement of Lenny Rogers.

**COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

In response to several inquiries related to when/if the Driver's License Agency on Highway 90 would reopen, Vice-Chairman Reese reached out to NCDOT and Representative Jeffrey Elmore,

among others. According to Monica Fuller, NCDOT Legislative Liaison, many smaller DMV offices closed earlier last year because of space limitations that prevented adequate social distancing. These offices may possibly reopen in the spring, depending on the status of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commissioner Lail attended the grand opening for BEATS Barre + Bike on December 17, 2020. He was pleased to see local residents open new businesses in Alexander County.

## **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Commissioner Peal made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no one present to speak during the Public Comment Period.

## **PUBLIC HEARING: LOCAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION – LUCAS MANSION**

Connie Kincaid, EDC Business Development Manager, presented a request from the Historic Preservation Committee to designate the Lucas Mansion, located at 316 Hiddenite Church Road, as a local landmark in accordance with N.C.G.S 160D-945. This designation will include both the interior and exterior of the mansion as well as the 1.5-acre lot upon which the building sits.

She provided the history of the Lucas Mansion, built in approx. 1898 and purchased by James Paul Lucas in 1908 who lived there until his death in 1952. The mansion currently remains consistent with the design and footprint following a major renovation by Mr. Lucas in 1914 and all original woodwork, windows, doors, floors, walls, and stairway are intact. When the property was sold in 1981 to R.Y. Sharpe and wife Eileen Lackey Sharpe, Mrs. Sharpe immediately began preserving the mansion, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. An addition was constructed in 1984 along with public restrooms and an elevator. The Lucas Mansion is now owned by the Hiddenite Center Inc., a private, non-profit 501(c)3 organization and home to the Hiddenite Arts & Heritage Center that includes an early 20<sup>th</sup> history museum, art gallery, and collections of gems/minerals and antique dolls/toys. The Alexander County Visitor's Center is also located on the first floor.

After a motion by Vice-Chairman Reese, second by Commissioner Lail, and unanimous vote, Chairman Yoder called the public hearing to order and requested any comments. There being none, Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Commissioner Peal made a motion to approve the designation of the Lucas Mansion as an Alexander County Historic Landmark. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **COVID-19 UPDATE**

Billie Walker, Assistant Health Director, reported that Alexander County's cumulative total for positive COVID-19 cases was now at 2,827 with 19 hospitalized. The NCDHHS dashboard shows us at 31 deaths; however, Ms. Walker advised that documentation from several hospitals and nursing facilities, once received, would increase that total to approx. 40. (Because the number of quarantined and recovered must be hand-counted, that information was not provided). Outbreaks have occurred in 3 facilities (one with 60 cases, another with 15 cases, and another with 47 cases and 10 deaths). Drive-thru testing continues on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 10:00 AM.

Alexander County has received 975 doses of the Pfizer vaccine and 1,200 doses of Moderna. Both require a second dose in 21 and 28 days respectively and are reported to be 95% effective. She reviewed the 4 phases of the prioritization plan, noting that Health Department staff began providing vaccines to the Phase 1A category (health care workers) last week. Phase 1B, Group 1 (adults 75+) will begin this week. Due to the interest in receiving the vaccine, a hotline (828-352-7724) and online sign-up form ([www.alexandercountync.gov/covid](http://www.alexandercountync.gov/covid)) are available for citizens to provide their contact information. Ms. Walker explained that someone from the Health Department would then make contact to schedule an appointment, but she asked for patience and understanding as staff are overwhelmed with testing, contact tracing, and scheduling vaccines. More than 300 appointments were made today and 100 more citizens must be called back.

In response to several questions asked by Board members, Ms. Walker provided the following information:

- Latest guidance suggests that citizens who have tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 30 days should not receive the vaccine. Some medical providers recommend the vaccine not be taken by anyone with antibodies regardless of the amount of time since contracting the virus.
- The mandated vaccine management system is not working well and is causing delays. Staff has been forced to use paper questionnaires and hand-key the data into the State system.
- Many citizens, especially the older population who are most at risk, do not have an email address, another requirement issued by the State that caused issues.
- Health Departments are guaranteed the same number of second doses as received in the first shipment (975 Pfizer and 1,200 Moderna) but there is no confirmed information regarding further allocations.

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, provided EMS call volume for the last quarter of 2020 that totaled 1,781 calls, an increase of 25% over 2019, with 73% of those calls assisting possible

or confirmed COVID-19 patients. Within the last week, 7 area hospitals have declared “diversion,” closing off emergency rooms to new patients arriving by ambulance and greatly increasing travel time for EMS (142 hours lost). He felt this would cause the 40 beds at the Samaritan’s Purse field hospital to fill up quickly. Emergency Services assisted at Valley Nursing Center last weekend due to the number of residents and staff testing positive and/or quarantined and are working with other facilities to determine needed PPE. EMS will also be helping administer vaccines.

Several commissioners thanked the Health Department and Emergency Services staff for their hard work and dedication during the pandemic.

## **ROAD CONDITION UPDATE**

Gary Herman, Public Information Officer, presented the following updates on the status of roads damaged by flooding that occurred on November 12, 2020 (this information was provided by Jason Willis, NCDOT Division 12 Staff Maintenance Engineer, as of December 29, 2020):

- Millersville Road – reopened on December 18, 2020.
- Nester Road – reopened on December 18, 2020.
- Cheatham Ford Road – bridge and pipe replacement currently under contract. Estimated completion date for bridge replacement is December 2021.
- Rocky Springs Road – bids opened on December 22, 2020 and contract awarded.
- Macedonia Church Road – bids opened on December 22, 2020 and contract awarded.
- Sulphur Springs Road – currently under contract.
- Sloan Road – currently under contract.
- Berea Church Quincy Road – currently under contract.
- Rocky Face Church Road – on-site pre-bid meeting scheduled for January 7, 2021.
- Old Wilkesboro Road – utility (power, cable, communications) conflicts being addressed before proceeding with contract.
- Hopewell Church Road – currently under contract.
- Lackey Mountain Road – on-site pre-bid meeting scheduled for January 7, 2021.
- Smith Grove Church Road – NCDOT will begin pipe replacement on January 4, 2021.
- Jud Smith Road – on-site pre-bid meeting scheduled for January 7, 2021.

Current damages are estimated at approx. \$5.7 million. Concerning Liledoun Road, which was damaged in June 2019, Mr. Willis reported that the contractor anticipates having the road opened on stone by January 9, 2021. Paving will follow around the end of March or sooner if weather and temperatures allow.

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, provided photos of damage sustained on several roads throughout the county. He also encouraged citizens/businesses with damage from the flooding to apply for financial assistance or low-interest loans through the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Vice-Chairman Reese urged citizens to refrain from driving around barriers at these locations.

## **NCACC FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCY RESOLUTION**

Chairman Yoder informed the Board that NCACC President Ronnie Smith was leading a task force to address food insecurity in North Carolina due to COVID-19 and after reading, made a motion to approve a resolution supporting the work of the task force, taking steps to sustain a resilient food system, and ensuring citizens have access to available resources. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Commissioner Peal explained that in Ohio, hunters could drop off deer meat to be processed and distributed to people in need. He was interested in whether this could be allowed in Alexander County.

Allison Brown, Extension Director, replied that deer meat could be donated to needy families if processed and packaged (at the hunter's expense) at a State approved and inspected facility; however, she advised that many facilities no longer accepted game due to the high demand for beef and pork. Der Holcomb, Extension Agent, added that many food pantries in the county were not equipped to handle raw meat.

## **DESIGNATION OF VOTING DELEGATE FOR NCACC LEGISLATIVE GOALS CONFERENCE**

Commissioner Peal made a motion to designate Chairman Yoder to serve as Voting Delegate at the virtual NCACC Legislative Goals Conference scheduled for January 14-15, 2021. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS**

Rick French, County Manager, presented the following appointments:

Commissioner Appointments – Appoint Commissioner Pennell to the Veterans Committee.

Appoint Commissioner Lail to the Partnership for Children Board of Directors and the WPCOG Policy Board as an alternate.

Appoint Commissioner Peal to the Farmland Preservation VAD Board.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the appointments. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #39 - #44 & PROJECT BUDGET ORDINANCE #P-1**

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #39 - #44 and Project Budget Ordinance #P-1 as follows:

Budget Amendment #39 – To budget for receipt of a Weather, Storm Preparedness, and Recovery grant from the Duke Energy Foundation to replace an outdated radio and purchase multiple ambient weather stations.

Budget Amendment #40 – To increase the DSS budget for 1) additional COVID-19 Foster Care Stipend funds from the State to reimburse DSS for payments made earlier in the budget year, 2) for Low Income Home Energy Assistance COVID-19 funds from the State known as “Pandemic LIEAP Funds, and 3) for LIEAP and Crisis Intervention Program Admin CARES Act funding from the State. To decrease the DSS budget for CARES Act funding that was received in advance but must be returned due to restrictions placed on eligible expenses that prevented spending the entire amount.

Budget Amendment #41 – To increase the Public Buildings budget for the purchase and installation of flag poles at the Services Center and to increase the Parks & Recreation budget for the purchase and installation of a flag pole at Rocky Face Park.

Budget Amendment #42 – To increase the budget for a transfer to the School Capital Improvements Fund based on the amount of FY 2020 school sales tax revenue in excess of the FY 2020 school debt service payments.

Budget Amendment #43 – To decrease the Detention Center budget revenues and expenses because of not accepting inmates from other counties due to health risks associated with COVID-19.

Budget Amendment #44 – To budget for the local matching funds required for the NC Department of Commerce Building Reuse Grant for Piedmont Composites.

Project Budget Ordinance #P-5 – To budget for the Piedmont Composites Building Reuse 2020 Project.

Commissioner Peal made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #39 - #44 and Project Budget Ordinance #P-1. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no items discussed during Other Business.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$2,742.07) and Tax Refunds (\$2,445.47) for November 25 – December 21, 2020.
- B. Minutes from the December 7, 2020 Regular Meeting.
- C. Application for I-CARE CSBG funding for Iredell and Alexander Counties for 2021-2022.
- D. NC Division of Emergency Management Designation of Applicant's Agent Resolution for FEMA reimbursement eligibility.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES**

At 6:57 PM, the Board transitioned into the Consolidated Human Services Board Meeting and proceeded as follows:

- Adoption of Agenda – Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve the CHSB Meeting agenda with the exception of Item #4 (Budgets Update), which will be discussed during the upcoming FY 2021-2022 budget process. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
- Public Comment – there was no one signed up to speak.
- DSS Report – Linda Clements, Assistant DSS Director, reviewed the following:
  - Flood Survivor Support – DSS partnered with East Taylorsville Baptist Church, American Red Cross, and the Health Department to open an evacuation site on November 12<sup>th</sup> and provide support to survivors. Although donations are no longer being accepted, staff is providing assistance with SBA loans and other financial support. Although a campground has been located in Maiden that may be able to accommodate the residents of the Hiddenite Family Campground, she reported that many wished to return to their previous address.

Commissioner Peal felt it was unwise to allow citizens to return to an extremely unsafe location, pointing out that the Board and County staff were working hard to address the situation and provide a permanent solution to prevent another tragedy.

- REDA Medicaid Audit – placed on hold in March 2020 due to COVID-19 and reinitiated in August 2020. NCDHHS reviews 10-20 cases per month for correct eligibility determination and has been pleased with the level of documentation provided. For the months of April, May, and June, DSS was slightly below target for appropriate approvals and denials and above target for no control issues.
- NC FAST Caseworker Certification Program – Session Law 2017-57, Section 11H.22 requires all caseworkers who utilize NC FAST for data input or eligibility

determinations for State programs to complete online training and certification every 3 years. Alexander County will begin the new program in May 2021.

- Medicaid Transformation 2021 – the transition from fee-for-service to pre-paid managed care originally scheduled for 2019 and later pushed to planned phases in 2020 will now occur all at once in 2021. Open enrollment is scheduled from March 15<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup> and anyone who doesn't choose a plan during that timeframe will be auto enrolled. Ms. Clements stated that DSS would still determine eligibility and collect applications; however, insurance companies will provide enrollment brokers that will answer questions and provide guidance. This change will apply to approx. 75% of the current Medicaid-enrolled population.
- Family-Child Protection & Accountability Act – also referred to as Rylan's Law, includes enhancements to NC FAST for child welfare as well as regional supervision and support teams. All 100 counties are required to enter into annual performance agreements with NCDHHS for all programs except Medicaid. The upcoming MOU covers January 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022.
- Families First Prevention Act – changes the focus of child welfare across the country in an attempt to prevent children from entering the foster care system. Funds previously used to reimburse foster care maintenance costs will be reallocated for prevention services allowing foster care candidates to remain with parents or relatives for up to 12 months with an evidence-based prevention plan.

Commissioner Peal expressed concerns that this would negatively affect foster families and create a budgetary shortfall because an additional program was being created by utilizing funds from another. Commissioner Lail agreed, noting that, while this was a good idea, there would always be a need for foster homes.

- Budgeting Trust Fund Accounts – effective July 1, 2021, Federal funds received by DSS for children in foster care and adult wards will be placed in a new budget “pass-through” line item.
- Annual Community Child Protection Report – the Community Child Protection Team reviews child fatalities and promotes a community-wide approach to child abuse/neglect. Membership is State-mandated and meetings have been held quarterly by Zoom due to COVID-19. Ms. Clements reported that Alexander County had no child fatalities in 2020.
- COVID-19 Impacts – Economic Services remain close to pre-COVID levels with the exception of Medicaid (up 8%) and staff is continuing auto-recertification and acceptance of verbal attestation regarding client income. There has been a slight reduction in new Adult Protection Services reports but an increase in guardianship cases. Congregate meal sites remain closed but staff is working hard to deliver meals. New Child Protection Services cases have also decreased but there is growth



in foster care cases, due in part to the court system closure. Face-to-face contact is being maintained as much as possible for both APS and CPS to monitor safety.

- 2019-2020 Local Economic Impact to Alexander County through DSS – more than \$6.7 million was distributed to the community through Food & Nutrition Services (\$5,914,968), Adult Assistance through rest home supplements or home improvements (\$311,000), Work First payments (\$120,000), Crisis Intervention (\$129,600), and Child Daycare Subsidies (\$200,220). This amount does not include medical/dental/mental health payments for services to 7,800 citizens with Medicaid and Health Choice coverage, value of meals distributed and in-home aide services for seniors and the disabled, child support enforcement collections from other counties and states, value of response to child/adult abuse and neglect cases, and staff salaries spent in the county.
- Senior Center Report – LEEANNE WHISNANT, Consolidated Human Services Director, reviewed the following:
  - Medicare Savings – staff assisted 389 Alexander County seniors in saving \$903,703 in 2020 Medicare costs. The \$1 million goal was impacted by a delay in the Medicare website and limited staff and volunteers.
  - COVID-19 Impacts – staff have remained available to the public for a variety of services including referrals, filling out forms, making copies, sending faxes, answering questions related to food, voting, Medicare and retirement, or just a friendly conversation (4,469 calls and outside face-to-face interactions). A COVID-19 vaccination clinic is scheduled at the Senior Center later in the week.
  - SHIIP Award – Kristy Hunt has been named the Western Region Volunteer of the Year by the NC Department of Insurance Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program. NC Commissioner of Insurance Mike Causey will present the award to Ms. Hunt on January 25, 2021.
- Budgets update – discussion of this item was removed from the agenda; however, Ms. Whisnant highlighted the decrease of DSS position postings over the last 3 budget years as follows – 48 positions posted in FY 2018-2019, 28 posted in FY 2019-2020, and 16 posted in FY 2020-2021. She also mentioned that budget increases over the past couple of years were related to being fully staffed, salary increases, COVID-19 disruptions, and compliance paybacks.
- Health Department Annual Training – Ms. Whisnant presented annual board member training materials required for the annual accreditation process that included essential public health functions, State vs. County appropriations, staffing requirements, etc.
- Closed Session – N.C.G.S. 143.318.11(a)(1) HIPAA Privacy Rule 45 CFR Parts 160 & 164 / N.C.G.S. 132-12 – Ms. Whisnant requested the bi-annual discussion of bad debt write-offs during Closed Session.

Ms. Whisnant took the opportunity to address complaints regarding the COVID-19 vaccination scheduling process, noting that the overwhelming response from the public (when added to testing, contract tracing, and routine services) had caused some delays; however, she assured citizens that someone would be back in touch with them to schedule their vaccination as soon as possible. In order to keep up, clinics have been scaled back, staff has been diverted to COVID-19 duties and are working weekends, and other County employees are being utilized where possible (HR answering phones, EMS administering vaccines). Ms. Whisnant reported that Alexander County was ahead of many counties as far as working through the vaccine priority list (many only halfway through Phase 1A).

Commissioner Pennell pointed out that, although Alexander County was small and had limited staff, we used our resources very well. He was proud of how the Health Department had handled the situation and thanked them and other departments for taking on extra duties to respond to the pandemic. Commissioner Peal echoed Commissioner Pennell's comments.

**CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 5, & 6) HIPAA PRIVACY RULE 45 CFR PARTS 160 & 164 / N.C.G.S. 132-12, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & PERSONNEL**

Chairman Yoder made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 8:06 PM to discuss bad debt write-offs, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 5 & 6). Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to adjourn at 8:43 PM. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

---

Larry G. Yoder, Chairman

---

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board