

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING March 1, 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
 Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, March 1, 2021 via Zoom 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 Peal led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

In response to numerous complaints regarding the amount of litter along Alexander County's roadways, Chairman Yoder mentioned that staff was investigating upcoming clean-up programs and opportunities such as the NCDOT Spring Litter Sweep. In addition, he asked the public to please avoid littering and thanked those willing to pick up trash if able.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Chairman Yoder requested the addition of a resolution to authorize an application to the NC Department of Commerce Building Reuse Grants Program for Project Buckeye One as Agenda Item #1A.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

RESOLUTION – APPLICATION FOR NC DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE BUILDING REUSE FUNDS FOR PROJECT BUCKEYE ONE

Chairman Yoder presented a resolution to authorize the submitting of a formal application to the NC Department of Commerce Building Reuse Grant Program to provide assistance to benefit Project Buckeye One in the amount of \$80,000. The company plans to renovate existing industrial space and create a minimum of 10 new jobs. A 5% grant match will be required by the County.

Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve the resolution authorizing the NC Department of Commerce grant application for Project Buckeye One. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: APPROVAL OF ROAD NAMES

Rick French, County Manager, submitted the following road name for approval, noting that it met all required regulations and had been checked for duplication and sound indexing:

<u>Road No.</u>	<u>Road Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
1144DT	Harvest Ridge Drive	Off Icard Ridge Road

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

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the road name as presented. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BETHLEHEM SEWER EXTENSION PROJECT REPORT

Benjie Thomas with West Consultants stated that the Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project was now substantially complete, in advance of the March 11, 2021 deadline. A total of 22,308 linear feet of gravity sewer and force main was installed and upgrades were made to 3 pump stations. The new system has been tested, passed initial inspection, and engineer's certifications have been submitted (except for the pump stations and a small portion on Chigger Ridge Road that is expected

this week). Remaining work includes clean-up and reseeded as well as an expected minor punch list after final inspection.

Mr. Thomas informed the Board that a final change order would be needed to reconcile installed pipe footage vs. what was estimated when the project was bid. He and Finance Director Jennifer Herman recently met with representatives from the NC Division of Water Infrastructure to resolve a shortage on the last loan disbursement payment which can be claimed as part of the next request.

WIRELESS BROADBAND EXPANSION PROJECT REPORT

David Moose, Compliance & Procurement Specialist, advised that staff had completed its review of the contract with Open Broadband, LLC for the Wireless Broadband Expansion Project, which has now been forwarded to legal counsel. He explained several needed changes to the proposal as follows:

- The 3 tower locations originally proposed for the Ellendale area have been eliminated and replaced with a site on Willie McLeod Road (the elevation of the Pierson location was not adequate for appropriate transmission and the Willie McLeod site will reduce lease costs associated with the Barrett Mountain / Stafford Mountain sites while serving the same number of homes).
- The two tower locations originally proposed to serve the eastern and southeastern portions of the county have also been eliminated (the elevation of the privately-owned site was inadequate and would need repairs to make the tower operable and the Cheatham Ford site would require construction of a tower).
- In order to avoid delaying the project, staff recommends moving forward in a two-phased approach, allowing Open Broadband to begin in areas ready for equipment placement. Phase 1 would include installing equipment on the Linney's Mountain, Willie McLeod, and Moore Mountain sites (serving approximately 400 homes). Open Broadband will continue to work with County staff to identify additional sites for the eastern and southeastern areas as Phase 2.

Commissioner Peal pointed out that several individuals in the St. Clair Road area off Highway 16 North had complained of problems with the Open Broadband internet service. Mr. Moose felt the backhaul from Linney's Mountain to Willie McLeod and Moore Mountain may help but he would pass those concerns on to Open Broadband.

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:

- Millersville Road, Nester Road, and Smith Grove Church Road – all reopened.

- Cheatham Ford Road Bridge – in design phase and contractor is removing debris and demolishing existing bridge. Estimated completion is December 2021.
- Rocky Face Church Road, Berea Church Quincy Road, and Sloan Road – preconstruction meetings held on February 2nd. Estimated completion is mid to late April 2021.
- Cheatham Ford Road, Hopewell Church Road, Lackey Mountain Road, and Jud Smith Road – preconstruction meetings to be scheduled soon by contractor.
- Macedonia Church Road – contractor is doing preliminary grading and erosion control.
- Rocky Springs Road – contractor mobilized on site February 17th.
- Sulphur Springs Road – pipe has been installed and is partially backfilled and a concrete headwall is being formed.
- Old Wilkesboro Road – no progress to date due to utility conflicts being addressed.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

Rick French, County Manager, presented the following appointment and reappointments:

Equalization & Review Board – appoint Alan Grant and reappoint Doug Ramsey, David Odom, Linda Barnette, Bobby Norton, and Donovan Douglas, all for one year.

Farmland Preservation VAD Board – reappoint Tim Glass and Eugene White for 3 years and Coy Reese, Scott Sink, and Dustin Queen for 4 years.

Commissioner Lail made a motion to approve the appointment and reappointments. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #56 - #62

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #56 - #62 as follows:

Budget Amendment #56 – To budget for a revised estimate of the 2020 Help America Vote Act grant funds.

Budget Amendment #57 – To increase the Sheriff’s Office budget to purchase new tasers with Federal grant funds passed through the NC Department of Public Safety, Governor’s Crime Commission.

Budget Amendment #58 – To increase the Health Department budget for additional Federal grant funds for the COVID-19 ELC Enhancing Detection and Vaccination Program.

Budget Amendment #59 – To increase the Health Department budget for a donation received for the Behavioral Health Program.

Budget Amendment #60 – To adjust the DSS budget for HCCBG funds moved from the Housing/Home Improvement line item to In-Home Services.

Budget Amendment #61 – To increase the DSS budget for CARES Act funding to assist with teleworking from home expenses for Child Protective and Adult Protective Services.

Budget Amendment #62 – To increase the Library budget for donations received and for a revised estimate of State Aid funds.

Commissioner Lail made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #56 - #62. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Rick French, County Manager, discussed the following issues during Other Business:

- A. Soil & Water staff is researching participation in a USDA Emergency Watershed Protection Program that helps communities recover after natural disasters. A few potential sites have also been identified. The preliminary cost to the County equals 25% or approximately \$20,000. More information will be provided as details are finalized.
- B. A Household Hazardous Waste & Document Destruction Day will be held on Saturday, May 1, 2021 at the Alexander County Administration Building parking lot from 8:00 AM until 12:00 PM.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$4,299.65) and Tax Refunds (\$2,339.80) for January 21 – February 18, 2021.
- B. Minutes from the February 1, 2021 Regular Meeting.

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

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 6:31 PM, the Board transitioned into the Consolidated Human Services Board Meeting and proceeded as follows:

- Public Comment – there was no one signed up to speak.
- COVID-19 Update – Billie Walker, Assistant Health Director, reported that Alexander County's cumulative total for positive COVID-19 cases is now at 3,856 with 13 hospitalized and 84 deaths. Testing continues on M/W/F at 10:00 AM, although there has been a significant decrease in the number of test appointments requested. Inbound calls

for the Health Department increased from 8,158 in December 2020 to 17,539 in January 2021 (65,737 in December to 180,681 in January for all County departments). A total of 64,681 calls were made to the COVID hotline in January.

Staff has administered all available Pfizer vaccines and there is uncertainty as to whether more of this brand will be received; however, weekly shipments of Moderna continue (500 doses received for the past two weeks). Ms. Walker advised that to date, 6,550 vaccines have been received with 6,458 administered and she provided U.S. Census data related to Alexander County's population vs. statistics of those who have taken the vaccine.

The CDC is predicting immunity for at least 3 months past virus infection or a second vaccine dose; therefore, citizens are not required to quarantine after close contact with a known positive case during that time. In addition, anyone who has had the virus should not take the vaccine until at least 3 months have passed; however, Ms. Walker suggested waiting until antibodies were completely gone before receiving the vaccine. Phase 3 (frontline essential workers) will begin with education and child care staff on March 3rd and manufacturing will begin on March 10th (depending on dosage availability).

In response to questions asked by Commissioner Pennell, Ms. Walker stated that the Health Department must legally vaccinate any NC resident regardless of address and that one brand did not produce more side effects compared to the other.

- DSS Report – Linda Clements, Assistant DSS Director, reviewed the following:
 - Aging Programs – growth in the population ages 65 and older is expected to more than double by 2060 to nearly a quarter of the U.S. population. This age group accounts for 22% of Alexander County residents. Currently, DSS provides In-Home Aide services to only .25% of that population (22 on wait list) and Nutrition Program services to only .9% (15 on wait list for home-delivered meals). Ms. Clements advised that the ability to serve more seniors was not possible by relying solely on funding from the WPCOG (based on population) and suggested the need for additional funding sources and/or community partnerships.
 - Economic Services – due to the expected confusion and increase in phone calls surrounding Medicaid Transformation (open enrollment begins March 15th), training is being provided to all Medicaid and front desk staff. There is also increased pressure from the State to prosecute individuals committing fraud, which is time intensive and requires collaboration with the court system. Counties may be forced to pay back benefits acquired by fraud to the State and then attempt to be reimbursed by the client.
 - Placement Challenges – public guardianships have increased statewide and are becoming an unfunded mandated DSS service. Alexander County's guardianship cases have increased up to 15% in the last couple of months alone. Ms. Clements mentioned that lack of emergency placement options was a major issue, especially when coupled with little to no advance warning of prison releases and/or the

presence of high mental health needs. This has led to youths sleeping at DSS a couple of times, creating a risky and uncomfortable situation for the client and staff alike.

Jesse Smathers, Vaya Health Community Relations Regional Director, reported that this program had been a challenge since the General Assembly eliminated the ability for area mental health authorities (LME/MCO's) to serve as public guardians, leaving the responsibility solely to departments of social services. Vaya is working to increase community-based and crisis services in the 22-county region to include mobile crisis management programs, facilities dedicated to children and emergency respite services, specialized therapeutic foster care programs for clients with Autism Spectrum Disorder, programs to target males ages 15-17 with behavioral needs, etc. He explained that the goal was to help youths remain with their families instead of being institutionalized.

- Families First Prevention Act – will permit candidates for foster care to remain with parents or relatives for up to 12 months with an evidence-based prevention plan. Funds that have previously been designated to reimburse the costs of foster care maintenance will be shifted to prevention services effective July 1, 2021.
- Budget Changes – included cost comparisons between foster homes licensed by DSS vs. private agencies, increase in County responsibility for residential placements after October 1st, staff retention and turnover needs including filling of several vacancies, and increase in adult guardianship cases. Ms. Clements also discussed proposed improvements such as eliminating the adult meals program wait list, a Crisis Response Fund, increasing the Economic Services Payback Fund back to previous years' level of \$50,000, and several staffing changes (hiring a Grant Writer / Crisis Response Coordinator, an Economic Services Training position, and conversion of two Adult Medicaid positions to a Special Programs position).
- MOU Performance – Alexander County DSS is over target percentages on all areas but two. Ms. Clements did not expect any issues by year's end, noting that these areas were normally at 100%.
- Senate Bills Impacting DSS – includes #61 Dental Services / Medicaid Transformation, #88 NC FAST Child Welfare Case Management, #89 Regional Supervision, #90 Social Services Reform, and #93 Assisting NC Families in Crisis.

CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CONTRACTUAL, & PERSONNEL

Chairman Yoder made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:35 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Lail made a motion to adjourn at 8:15 PM. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Larry G. Yoder, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board