

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING August 2, 2021

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: Larry Yoder, Chairman (participated via conference call)
Ronnie Reese, Vice-Chairman
Marty Pennell

ABSENT: Josh Lail

STAFF: Rick French, County Manager
Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, August 2, 2021 in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chairman Reese called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Board held a moment of silence in remembrance of Dr. Jeffrey P. Peal who was killed in an automobile accident on July 19, 2021.

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Vice-Chairman Reese stated that Commissioner Peal was a good friend and good Board member who served Alexander County well, noting that he would be truly missed. He asked for continued prayers for the Peal family.

Commissioner Pennell also spoke about his close friendship with Commissioner Peal and his desire to help his fellow man. He felt Commissioner Peal was a true servant, especially to children and his community.

Chairman Yoder pointed out that Commissioner Peal, who stood up for his beliefs and touched many lives, could always be counted on to study his materials be well-prepared for every Commissioners’ Meeting, which he greatly appreciated. He stated that Commissioner Peal had been a great asset to Alexander County.

Vice-Chairman Reese recognized two new businesses – The Drip Factory and Rocky Spring Supply, LLC, noting that he had attended both ribbon cutting ceremonies.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

After expressing his condolences to the Board and Peal family, Sammy Adkins discussed ongoing water problems in the Stan De La subdivision that included breaches in several locations, burst pipes, and damage to property as a result. He reported that the City of Hickory continually made section repairs to the 35-year old lines, the most recent on July 4th and again at the same location on July 16, 2021. Mr. Adkins thanked the City of Hickory crews for their efforts, but felt these repairs were similar to placing a “Band-Aid on a large wound” due to the aging system and its condition. He provided a petition that contained 46 signatures requesting the water lines within the Stan De La subdivision be replaced.

PUBLIC HEARING: APPROVAL OF ROAD NAMES

Rick French, County Manager, submitted the following road name for approval, which has met required regulations and was checked for duplication and sound indexing:

| <u>Road No.</u> | <u>Road Name</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1301MH | Holly Tree Lane | Cross street Blair Road |

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

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

PUBLIC HEARING: CONDITIONAL USE CASE 21-5 – SERUSA

Vice-Chairman Reese reviewed the order of proceedings for conditional use hearings and Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, gave an oath of sworn testimony to all individuals wishing to speak.

Bill Rogers, Chief Code Enforcement Officer, explained that this public hearing was continued from the June 21, 2021 Commissioners' Meeting where Conditional Use Case 21-5 was tabled due to unanswered questions related to buffers and location of portable restrooms. He reiterated that the property owners, Daniel and Beth Serusa, proposed an outdoor artist market at 449 NC Highway 16 North, a 2.81-acre tract zoned H-C, that is currently vacant. Mr. Rogers provided updated photos of the property and advised that buffers meeting required height and species had been planted around the perimeter and gravel delivered.

Commissioner Pennell requested clarification on the proposed location of the market and portable restrooms in conjunction with the entrance from Highway 16 North. Applicant Beth Serusa approached the podium and a brief discussion was held regarding market location and portable restroom placement. Ms. Serusa explained that a berm had recently been created to the south side of the property and suggested the portable restrooms be located there. Commissioner Pennell was open to any location as long as the restrooms were placed a good distance away from neighboring property lines.

There being no further comments, Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve Conditional Use Permit 21-5 with the following conditions:

1. All relevant sewage disposal and water supply must be approved by Alexander County Environmental Health;
2. All solid waste must be contained and disposed of in accordance with the Alexander County Solid Waste Ordinance;
3. Operating hours will be limited to 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM;
4. Operations will be limited to no more than two days per week;
5. A driveway permit must be obtained from the NC Department of Transportation if required;
6. No outside storage of goods or wares will be allowed beyond operating hours;
7. Portable restrooms must be located away from any adjoining property lines.

Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

GDX REPORT FOR 2020

Cherry Kilby, Veterans Service Director, reviewed the 2020 Geographical Distribution of Veterans Administration Expenditures for Alexander County that included the following information:

| Type | 2020 | 2019 | Increase % |
|--------------------|-------|-------|------------|
| Veteran population | 2,283 | 2,189 | 4.29% |

| | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------|
| Total VA expenditures paid into county | \$25,915,000 | \$24,047,000 | 7.76% |
| Compensation & Pension / Burial | \$12,745,000 | \$11,932,000 | 6.81% |
| Education | \$651,000 | \$502,000 | 29.68% |
| Healthcare | \$12,242,000 | \$11,497,000 | 6.47% |

Alexander County’s veteran population currently totals 6.13%. Ms. Kilby clarified that compensation/pensions were non-taxed and paid directly to veterans and that monies for education were often paid directly to families but could also sent to colleges. The amount provided for healthcare represents veterans receiving care as well as funds paid directly to vets who would not have received care otherwise (uninsured, limited coverage, or tendency to skip care).

Commissioner Pennell inquired about attendance at veteran organization (DAV, VFW, etc.) functions by younger veterans. Ms. Kilby replied that participation by the younger generation of veterans was very slim, mainly due to other responsibilities such as employment and younger children.

Chairman Yoder asked if VA medical facilities were able to provide adequate medical care and in a timely manner. Ms. Kilby explained that the VA had a prioritization list based on age, health concerns, underlying issues, etc. that determined treatment timeframe; however, she pointed out that the VA would pay for healthcare appointments at any local medical facility as long as the veteran reported the visit within 72 hours.

The Board conveyed its appreciation to our veterans for their service to our country.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING SALE OF PROPERTY TO PARAGON FILMS, INC.

Rick French, County Manager, reminded the Board of action taken at the May 24, 2021 Commissioners’ Meeting to accept the offer of \$600,000 made by Paragon Films, Inc. to purchase a 25.613-acre tract on White Plains Road. He provided a resolution authorizing the sale of that property and directing the County to execute a contract or other necessary documentation.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the resolution authorizing the sale of property to Paragon Films, Inc. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ALEXANDER COUNTY TREASURES BOOK

Gary Herman, Public Information Officer, reported that in 2012, Alexander County Government and EDC entered into an agreement with Alex History Group, LLC to fund the printing of the “Alexander County Treasures” history book. A total of 2,100 books were printed at a cost of \$66,232.20, which were sold by *The Taylorsville Times* for \$49.95 plus tax. To date, 1,100 copies have been sold and the County has been reimbursed \$46,018.56.

In order to encourage citizens to purchase the remaining 1,000 copies, staff is proposing a new, lower price of \$20 including tax. Mr. Herman informed the Board that the books would be sold at all 3 library branches as well as other interested County departments capable of handling cash payments. He also suggested several books be reserved for special presentations or the county's bicentennial celebration in 2047.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the new price of \$20 for the "Alexander County Treasures" book as well as reserving one case for future use. Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

DESIGNATION OF VOTING DELEGATE FOR NCACC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to designate Chairman Yoder to serve as Voting Delegate at the NCACC Annual Conference scheduled for August 12-14, 2021 in New Hanover County. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDS

Rick French, County Manager, explained that approval of this resolution was needed to formally accept all American Rescue Plan Act appropriations and authorize County staff to apply for, receive, and administer these funds in accordance with all Federal and State laws, regulations, and guidance. Alexander County will receive a total of \$7,283,353 over two budget years and to date has received the first appropriation of \$3,641,676.50.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the resolution accepting the funds from the American Rescue Plan Act. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

MEETING SCHEDULE CHANGES FOR SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER

Rick French, County Manager, asked the Board to reschedule the September 13th Commissioners' Meeting to be held on September 20, 2021 and the October 4th Meeting to be held on October 11, 2021.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the meeting schedule changes for September and October. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

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

Review Officer and Watershed / Floodplain / Subdivision Administrator – appoint Dustin Millsaps with the WPCOG.

Hiddenite Fire Department Fire Relief Fund Board of Trustees – appoint Chris Stikeleather to replace Grover Sharpe.

ABC Board – reappoint Donny Teague for 3 years.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the appointments and reappointments. Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the resolution appointing Dustin Millsaps as a Review Officer for Alexander County. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #1 - #8

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #1 - #8 as follows:

Budget Amendment #1 – To budget for the remaining balance of the March 2021 contract with Open Broadband, LLC to expand broadband services in the county.

Budget Amendment #2 – To increase the Garage budget for higher monthly rent payments effective with the October 1, 2021 lease renewal.

Budget Amendment #3 – To increase the Sheriff's Office budget for backordered ammunition and flash-bangs ordered in FY 2021 that will be delivered in FY 2022.

Budget Amendment #4 – To increase the Elections budget for eligible HAVA grant expenses for backordered items ordered in FY 2021 that will be delivered in FY 2022.

Budget Amendment #5 – To increase the Sheriff's Office budget for use of State funds from Unauthorized Substance Tax distributions received in prior years that will be used to purchase an automatic license plate detection service.

Budget Amendment #6 – To increase the Fire / Emergency Services budget for a backordered truck camper shell and lights ordered in FY 2021 that will be delivered in FY 2022.

Budget Amendment #7 – To budget for participation in the USDA Emergency Watershed Protection Program for debris removal at 3 streams destroyed during Hurricanes Zeta and Eta.

Budget Amendment #8 – To increase the Governing Body budget for promotional and marketing materials for the County.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #1 - #8. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

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

- A. Christine Gates, Senior Center Director, has officially retired after 10 years of service with Alexander County.
- B. Engineers with McGill Associates notified County staff that the new parking area at Wittenburg Access is nearly complete.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$469.63) and Tax Refunds (\$2,131.28) for June 14 – July 11, 2021 and Tax Release Requests (\$521.17) and Tax Refunds (\$2,125.98) for July 12-25, 2021.
- B. Minutes from the June 21, 2021 Regular Meeting.
- C. Updated Alexander County Library Policy Manual.
- D. Memorandum of Understanding with the Taylorsville Rotary Club, Inc. and Taylorsville Rotary Foundation, Inc. for the funding, naming, and use of the performance stage at the Courthouse Park.

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 6:44 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.
- Public Health Report – LeeAnne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, reviewed the following:
 - COVID-19 Update – there has been a substantial increase in positive COVID-19 cases both county and statewide. Approx. 75% of NC counties are in the “red” category (critical community spread) including Alexander County who has seen 75 new positive cases in the past 7 days and 111 in the past 14 days (3 currently hospitalized and one death in the past month). NCDHHS statistics show that 80-90% of new cases are the Delta variant and 94% have occurred in the unvaccinated

population; however, breakthrough cases are occurring in vaccinated citizens. To date, only 36% of Alexander County citizens are fully vaccinated.

In response to questions by the Board, Ms. Whisnant stated that citizens who have had COVID-19 could still catch the Delta variant but would more than likely experience milder symptoms. The average timeframe that citizens retain COVID-19 antibodies is 6 months; however, this varies greatly by individual.

- Duke Endowment Dental Grant – Alexander County has been approved for a \$400,000 Duke Endowment dental grant for a two-year school-based oral health program that will target un/underinsured students or those without a dental provider. Dental screenings are currently offered at all schools, but this grant will allow for in-school treatment at both East and West Middle Schools beginning in January 2022. Ms. Whisnant was hopeful the program would be successful and eventually lead to dedicated space at each school for Dental Clinic staff to provide these services.
- Behavioral Health Program Fee Scale – the NC Rural Health grant that offsets 0% pay behavioral health clients officially ended last year, triggering the need for changes to the fee scale for the program to remain self-sufficient. Ms. Whisnant proposed a sliding 40% - 100% income-based fee scale and provided average patient costs (a family of 4 with an annual income of \$26,501 - \$36,438 would pay 40% vs. 100% if annual income is greater than \$66,250).

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve a sliding 40% - 100% income-based fee scale for the Behavioral Health Program as recommended. Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

- Maternal Health Program Update – Dr. Michael Kepley has retired from obstetrics but will continue gynecology services. Natural Beginnings Birth & Wellness Center in Statesville has been selected as the new obstetrics provider. Ms. Whisnant stated that patients would not experience major changes as deliveries would still occur at Davis Regional Medical Center and high-risk referrals would continue at Catawba Valley Medical Center.
- Senior Center Update – Ms. Whisnant reiterated that Christine Gates, Senior Center Director, had retired. Kristy Hunt will assume these duties as Interim Director.
- DSS Report – Linda Clements, Assistant DSS Director, reviewed the following:
 - Departmental Updates – Medicaid Managed Care began on July 1st with no significant issues and planning for foster care tailored plans will begin next year. Youth and adult placements continue to be a challenge and several children have been sent out-of-state. Ms. Clements reported that staff was developing a DSS evacuation shelter plan, noting that State-level changes could require county shelters to remain independent for 72 hours. Other items mentioned included

cancellation of the DSS Employee Celebration Luncheon due to the re-emergence of COVID-19 and renter's assistance through the HOPE Program.

- Golden Opportunity Event – several County departments, businesses, and organizations worked together to organize this event held on June 14, 2021. Sheriff Chris Bowman gave a presentation on fraud prevention and the Health Department provided medication lock boxes to seniors who attended.

Ms. Clements also mentioned receiving diapers and wipes through the March of Dimes, which are available to families in need. In addition, the WPCOG provided school supplies to Work First Program families.

- DSS Actions / Plans – a job description has been drafted for the new DSS training position and the planning phase to improve foster parent recruitment has begun. Ms. Clements advised that a grant application was submitted to Resourceful Communities requesting \$25,000 for the DSS Nutrition Program; however, due to the overwhelming amount of applications, Alexander County was not funded. The Senior Center is now a meal distribution site, which allows the Center to remain open while Interim Director Kristy Hunt is at the Bethlehem branch location. On-site placement of a Vaya Health staff member at DSS is delayed due to a reorganization of Vaya personnel and a recent resignation.

In response to a question by Commissioner Pennell, Ms. Clements stated that Alexander County currently had 64 children in foster care, which may increase by 3 more in the near future. She explained that the COVID-19 pandemic and closing of court had caused delays in case hearings, adjudications, and permanence, which contributed to the increase (our average number is upper 40's).

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

Closed Session was not held.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to adjourn at 7:12 PM. Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Larry G. Yoder, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board