

Draft

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING**      November 1, 2021

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

**PRESENT:**    Larry Yoder, Chairman  
                  Ronnie Reese, Vice-Chairman  
                  Kent Herman  
                  Josh Lail

**ABSENT:**     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, November 1, 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**

Chairman Yoder gave the invocation and Commissioner Lail led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

On behalf of the Board, Chairman Yoder expressed his condolences to the family of Harry Robertson, former County Commissioner, who passed away last week. He also mentioned that NCDOT was experiencing a lack of funding (mainly due to reduced gasoline tax revenue from COVID-19) that could possibly affect future projects; however, the Highway 127 widening and County Home Road / Highway 16 South intersection projects are still planned.

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Chairman Yoder requested the addition of Subsection (3) to Closed Session for the purpose of attorney / client privilege to discuss a possible contract.

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

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Macy Jones requested the Board reconsider its plans to spend the County's entire ARPA allotment of \$7,283,353 on water / sewer infrastructure and invest at least \$1 million into programs with the potential to impact more citizens. Her suggestions included bonuses to frontline workers (EMS, fire and rescue, law enforcement, and teachers), childcare assistance, grants to struggling businesses and 501(c)3 organizations, fuel and supplies for food pantries and churches, as well as financial support for United Way, Partnership for Children, Foothills Homeless Coalition, etc.

Dr. Dianne Little, Alexander County United Way President, provided preliminary results of United Way's community needs survey, noting that 148 surveys were collected. She reported that broadband ranked the most critical countywide need and stated that, while food insecurity and homelessness did not place in the countywide ranking, these issues did appear in the residential results. The countywide ranking was as follows – 1) broadband, 2) education, 3) health care, 4) and 5) housing, 6) and 7) transportation. Dr. Little plans to present the entire analysis at the December Commissioners' Meeting in hopes to provide the Board with guidance as to areas that could benefit from ARPA funding.

Priscilla Jenkins, Founder / CEO of The Bridge Community, Inc., a non-profit that collaborates with existing charitable organizations to bridge the gap between individual or family needs and available resources, discussed the ever-growing number of adults and children displaced from permanent housing. Since February, The Bridge Community has housed more than 25 clients in hotels, prevented 22 evictions, and provided housing assistance to two domestic violence victims; however, because Alexander County does not have a shelter, many clients were referred to other counties. In addition, she stated that one-third of citizens receiving meals from the 957 Mobile Café were homeless and that the Alexander County School System reported 87 students without a permanent address last school year. Beginning on November 26, 2021, a shelter will be available every Friday and Saturday night, providing 4 meals and a shower, but only for 14 weeks. In order to provide a permanent solution, Ms. Jenkins requested \$2 million of the County's ARPA funding be set aside for the research and establishment of an Alexander County shelter.

## **WATER SYSTEM EXTENSION PROJECT REPORT**

R.J. Mosley with McGill Associates, P.A., informed the Board that the Water System Extension Project was nearing completion. The system is operational and final approvals are in-hand with the exception of Emerald Point Drive and Crappie Cove Lane that were added late in the second portion of the project and should be completed in approx. 60 days.

The planning stages of this project began in 2017 with identification of areas that would close several dead end loops within the existing water system and provide service to locations where multiple requests for water had been received over the years. In 2018, the County was awarded a

low-interest loan from the NCDEQ Division of Water Infrastructure that was used to install 71,100 linear feet of 6-inch and 8-inch water lines along Zeb Watts Road, Liberty Grove Church Road, Dula Loop, Ned Herman Road, Poly Bowman Road, Deal Farm Lane, KirkPatrick Road, Espie Little Road, Teague Town Road, Icard Ridge Road, B&T Lane, and Fox Court. A 6-inch PVC pipe in the Wittenburg Springs subdivision was replaced with an iron ductile pipe.

Because project bids were advantageous, County staff worked with McGill Associates to identify an additional 6 locations within the county for water service including Sanchez Road, RZ Bowman Drive and William Reece Lane, Clouse Lane, Friday Cockrell Lane and Rabbit Hollow Lane, Al Fox Road and Crowson Road, and Outrigger Drive and Drum & Hammer Drive. This resulted in the installation of another 11,500 linear feet of line.

Mr. Mozeley pointed out that citizens interested in tapping onto the County's water system should contact the City of Hickory.

## **VAYA HEALTH PRESENTATION**

Zack Shepherd, Vaya Health Regional Community Relations Director, gave a slide show presentation that included the following information:

- Vaya Health offers 3 distinct health plans – two mental health/substance use/intellectual and developmental disabilities plans (one for individuals qualifying for Medicaid and another for un/underinsured) and a home / community-based services plan for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- House Bill 403 (Medicaid Managed Care) – the goal of Medicaid transformation is to deliver whole person care (physical and behavioral health needs), unite communities to address needs and provide cost-effective solutions, and transition to provider-based care management.
- Three types of prepaid health plans –Standard Plans will address a majority of the Medicaid population with mild to moderate challenges, Tailored Plans are available for more complex behavioral or intellectual needs, and the Tribal Option is offered to specific indigenous communities. Standard Plans went live on July 1, 2021. Vaya Health has been awarded a Tailored Plan and is in the process of developing contracts to go live on July 1, 2022.
- Alexander County Medicaid statistics – there are currently 8,435 Medicaid-eligible residents in Alexander County. An estimated 7,796 moved to Standard Plans in July 2021 and 639 is expected to remain with Vaya for a Tailored Plan.
- Catchment Area Crossover – 9 counties formerly associated with Cardinal Innovations will join Vaya Health in early 2022, bringing Vaya's catchment area to 31 counties.

## **NATIONAL FARM-CITY WEEK**

After introducing her staff, County Extension Director Allison Brown discussed National Farm-City Week celebrated each year during the week before Thanksgiving to recognize the contributions that farmers make to both rural and urban settings. With the COVID-19 pandemic, more emphasis has been placed on how food moves from the farm to our table, which has proven how important locally produced goods are to the community.

Ms. Brown provided the following Alexander County statistics (according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture):

- There are more than 544 farms located in Alexander County with an average size of 100 acres.
- The average farmer is 56 years old.
- \$176 million in crops, livestock, poultry, and farm products is sold from Alexander County farms.
- Alexander County ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in the state for beef cattle, 4<sup>th</sup> for layer poultry houses, and 12<sup>th</sup> for broilers.

Each commissioner was given a basket filled with products sold by local farms and producers to spotlight our agriculture community.

## **POWER PLANT WORKER APPRECIATION DAY PROCLAMATION**

After reading, Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve a proclamation declaring November 1, 2021 as Power Plant Appreciation Day. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **CHRISTMAS PARADE ROAD CLOSURE ORDINANCE**

Chairman Yoder presented an updated ordinance to declare a temporary road closure each year on the first Saturday of December from 2:00-6:00 PM for the Alexander County Christmas Parade. The route description was as follows:

Liledoun Road to intersection of Highway 90, right onto Highway 90, right on Main Avenue Drive, left on Highway 16 South, right on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, left on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and right on Cougar Avenue. A portion of School Drive from ACHS to the intersection of Liledoun Road will also be closed.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the updated ordinance declaring a temporary road closure for the Annual Alexander County Christmas Parade. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS**

Rick French, County Manager, requested the following appointments:

Library Board of Trustees – appoint Eugene Scott for 3 years.

Vaya Health Region 3 Board – appoint Rick French and Vice-Chairman Reese.

Commissioner Lail made a motion to approve the appointments. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #28 - #33**

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #28 - #33 as follows:

Budget Amendment #28 – To increase the Economic Development budget for estimate costs of historical building code review services.

Budget Amendment #29 – To increase the Public Building / Maintenance budget to repair damage to the sally port door at the Detention Center caused by a suspect who crashed into the door after fleeing from law enforcement.

Budget Amendment #30 – To increase the Sheriff’s Office budget for equipment purchased in FY 2022 with insurance proceeds received from a wrecked vehicle in FY 2021.

Budget Amendment #31 – To increase the Sheriff’s Office budget for use of Unauthorized Substance Tax funds to purchase a law enforcement K-9, vehicle cage, trainer’s course, and other related items.

Budget Amendment #32 – To adjust the multi-year Park Improvements Project Fund for cost estimates for pavement behind the performance stage, signage, and other potential items needed to complete the Courthouse Park Project.

Budget Amendment #33 – To increase the budget for the FY 2022 General Fund transfer to the Park Improvements Project Fund to cover the cost of pavement behind the performance stage, signage, and other potential items needed to complete the Courthouse Park Project.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #28 - #33. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

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

- A. The Friends of the Library group is hosting a book sale on November 4-6, 2021 (9:00 AM to 5:00 PM) and November 7<sup>th</sup> (1:00 PM to 5:00 PM) at 135 Commercial Park Drive, across from the CVCC / Alexander Applied Technologies Center.
- B. Alexander County EDC was awarded a \$25,000 Hometown Revitalization grant from Duke Energy to assist small businesses impacted by COVID-19. The following businesses received \$2,500 to supplement their operations and survive the pandemic – Alexander Christian Academy, Bethlehem ACE Hardware, Bethlehem Dental Care, Brushy Mountain Brews, Burger Basket, Friendship Upholstery Company, Fueled, Linney’s Mill, Mexico Viejo, Paul Robert Chair, Inc., and The Vault.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$1,117.76) and Tax Refunds (\$1,683.82) for October 1-31, 2021.
- B. Minutes from the October 11, 2021 Regular Meeting.
- C. Resolution approving the Local Water Supply Plan for the Alexander County Water System pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-355(1).

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 6:54 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.
- DSS Report – Linda Clements, Assistant DSS Director, reviewed the following:
  - REDA Medicaid Audit – DSS had two findings (one active case and one terminated/denied case) that resulted in a total overpayment of \$357.74 (the total overpayment for all DSS organizations statewide was \$41,321.73). The Alexander County Corrective Action Plan will be developed through a Microsoft Teams meeting on December 12, 2021. The State recommends participation by several key DSS staff members, County Manager, and the BOCC Chairman or designee.
  - Staffing Update – the new training position has been filled and interviews for the modified administrative assistant will be held this week.
  - LIHWAP – as of mid-October, only 80 of the 450 water service providers in NC had enrolled in the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program; therefore, less restrictive terms are being developed in hopes to gain more interest before the

program opens on December 1, 2021. Leeanne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, reported that all Alexander County water providers had agreed to participate.

- NCFAST Recertification – notification was received that all current NCFAST users must be recertified within 18 months; however, new users are only given 90 days.
- Child Welfare Update – there are currently 67 children in foster care plus 4 more in the 18-21 program. Ms. Clements reviewed revisions to NC statutes affecting child welfare and noted that staffing vacancies continued to be a challenge. Effective October 1, 2021, the Federal government will no longer reimburse the board rate for IV-E eligible children remaining in congregate care for more than 14 days; however, the Governor’s House and Senate budget include bridge funding to cover the Federal portion (100% the first year and 50% the second year). Staff is developing a Child Welfare Disaster Plan to address 24/7 operation, status tracking for children in custody, communication with other states, and record retentions and access during loss of power.
- Community Events – in October, staff collected and distributed non-perishable food to congregate meal participants in recognition of Older Adult Malnutrition Week and held a trick-or-treating event for foster children (as well as children of employees). November is National Adoption Month and a Foster Parent Association Meeting will be held on November 2<sup>nd</sup> at Mt. Herman Baptist Church. Foster Parent Orientations will be held at DSS on November 8<sup>th</sup> and December 6<sup>th</sup> and a MAPP class is planned for January 2022.
- Public Health Report – Billie Walker, Assistant Health Director, reported that the cumulative total for positive COVID-19 cases as of today was 6,491 with 7 hospitalized and 125 deaths. There have been 54 new positive cases over the past 7 days and 106 in the past 14 days. To date, 40% of Alexander County citizens are fully vaccinated and 42% have received one dose. Our positivity rate is 5.6% compared to 5% statewide. Ms. Walker reviewed a decision tree used by Health Department staff to determine eligibility for boosters and third doses. She advised that once FDA-approved, vaccines for children ages 5-11 would be received in waves (300 doses in first wave and 100 doses in both second and third waves). Peoples Drug Store will also receive 100 doses in each of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> waves.
- COVID-19 Fees Approval – Ms. Walker requested approval of additional codes for Moderna third doses and boosters, the Pfizer vaccine for ages 5-11, and preventative medicine / risk factor education intervention.

Commissioner Lail made a motion to approve the additional COVID-19 fees as requested. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3, 4, 5, & 6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CONTRACTUAL, & PERSONNEL**

Chairman Yoder made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:21 PM for the purpose of attorney/client privilege and to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3, 4, 5, & 6). Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Commissioner Lail made a motion to adjourn at 8:38 PM. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

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Larry G. Yoder, Chairman

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Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board