BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS **ALEXANDER COUNTY**
REGULAR MEETING December 2, 2024 **STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

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

STAFF: Ben Faulkenberry, County Attorney
Todd Herms, County Manager
Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, December 2, 2024 in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Herman stated that the Alexander County Farmland Preservation Board just accepted an additional 1,639 acres into the Voluntary Agricultural District, bringing the total acreage to 13,509.

Vice-Chairman Reese, along with Commissioner Herman and County Manager Todd Herms, attended a Chief's Meeting last week to encourage continued communication between the County and emergency departments. Vice-Chairman Reese thanked the fire chiefs, volunteers, first responders, and all emergency personnel for the job they do each day.

Chairman Lail and Commissioner Pennell attended a networking event today that was sponsored by the Economic Development Office in an effort to promote Alexander County to businesses, industries, and investors.

Commissioner Pennell encouraged everyone to check on their neighbors and loved ones during the cold weather months, especially the elderly.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

SWEARING IN CEREMONY FOR ALEXANDER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Honorable Dale Graham, Chief District Court Judge, administered oaths of office to Board of Education members Jesse Bowles, Corey McLain, and Shannon Oxentine as well as County Commissioners Kent Herman and Josh Lail.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Bill Johnson, resident of Toledo Street in Stony Point, expressed concerns with two properties next to his that have multiple junked cars with high grass/weeds growing around them. He requested assistance from the County, noting that the problem had been ongoing for many years but continues to get worse.

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, read comments submitted by Steve Barrett who reported issues with his neighbor's loose, aggressive dogs that have caused safety concerns for his family and caregivers. The dogs have now been surrendered to Animal Services; however, he requested that the Animal Control Ordinance be changed to require that dogs be restrained.

FOUNDATION FORWARD PRESENTATON

Ron Lewis and David Streater with Foundation Forward, Inc. presented a framed copy of the Civil Rights Amendments to the Board. The non-profit organization also worked with the County during construction of Courthouse Park to install the Charters of Freedom monuments consisting of the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights.

NEW ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVE GRANT PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Chris Platé, Interim Economic Development Director, discussed new guidelines for the Economic Development Incentive Grant Program that would offer a more streamlined and simplified approach to attract new investments to Alexander County. He explained that the previous policy included job creation as part of the eligibility criteria, but the new program will focus on the financial investment made by companies or industries.

Key features of the new program include tiered investment thresholds to incentivize substantial investments and a lower entry threshold for existing firms to support their growth. Existing businesses can qualify for grants with a minimum capital investment of $500,000, while new companies must invest at least $2 million to qualify. Grants will consist of reimbursements of ad valorem taxes over a 5-year period.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the Economic Development Incentive Grant Program guidelines effective immediately. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVE GRANT FOR PIEDMONT COMPOSITES

Chris Platé, Interim Economic Development Director, requested approval of an Economic Development Incentive Grant for Piedmont Composites & Tooling, LLC, otherwise referred to as "Project Percent," to help secure a $7.5 million capital investment to expand the company's existing facility and purchase related equipment, which will create 6-10 new jobs.

David Himebaugh, President of Piedmont Composites, spoke briefly about products offered and plans to grow the business.

Based on the planned investment, Mr. Platé recommended a Level 2 performance-based grant in an amount not to exceed $170,635. Ad valorem tax reimbursements will take place over a 5-year period beginning in 2027.

After a motion by Commissioner Yoder, 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 Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve a Level 2 Economic Development Incentive Grant to Piedmont Composites in an amount not to exceed $170,625. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: ZONING OVERLAY DISTRICT PETITION ZOD 24-01

Amy Bucknum, County Planner, presented Zoning Overlay District Petition ZOD 24-01 submitted by the Alexander County Historic Preservation Commission who requested the establishment of a Downtown Taylorsville Historic Overlay District on the approx. 8 acres that make up the current Downtown Taylorsville Historic District that was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in August 2024. The purpose of this overlay district would be to guide future renovations and development of the historic area to maintain property values and prevent incongruous change.

After reviewing aerial maps and criteria to be considered when reviewing zoning overlay districts, Ms. Bucknum reported that the Downtown Taylorsville Historic District was located in an Urban Services Area with a mix of commercial and residential development. In addition, she advised that approval of this request would not change the base zoning of the area or have any effect on the Downtown Overlay District already in place, but would provide an opportunity for the Historic Preservation Commission to review and consent to any building changes by issuing a Certificate of Appropriateness.

The Planning Board held a public hearing on November 14, 2024 to consider this petition and voted unanimously to recommend approval based on consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code.

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

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the Downtown Taylorsville Historic Overlay District based on the petition's consistency with the Alexander County Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

2023-2024 AUDIT REPORT

Beau Hildebrand with Martin Starnes & Associates, presented a favorable audit report for FY 2023-2024 that included the following information:

- General Fund revenues – the top two sources of revenue were ad valorem taxes (property and motor vehicle taxes) at 49% and local option sales taxes at 26%. Remaining sources included restricted intergovernmental (federal and state grants) at 11%, sales and services (Health Department, Detention, EMS, License Plate Agency) at 7%, permits and fees (Inspections and Register of Deeds) at 3%, earned interest at 3%, and other (donations, private grants, ABC tax, video programming tax) at 1%. For FY 2024, property tax revenue increased by 18% and sales taxes increased by 1.2%.

- General Fund expenditures – the top 4 overall expenses were public safety at 34%, human services at 25%, general government at 17%, and education at 16%. Remaining areas included debt service at 2%, culture and recreation at 3%, environmental protection at 2%, and economic and physical development at 1%. For FY 2024, public safety expenses increased by 4.9%, human services increased by 2.3%, education increased by 0.6%, and general government increased by 0.8%.

- General Fund debt – $1,317,000 as of June 30, 2024; will be paid off in 2026.

- Fund Balance – 40.22% as of June 30, 2024 ($26,508,054 total / $21,535,929 available).

- Solid Waste Fund – budgetary net loss of $167,117.

- Water & Sewer Funds – budgetary net income of $1,879,966 for the County Water & Sewer Fund. As of June 30, 2024, outstanding debt totaled $10,833,423; will be paid off in 2041.

Mr. Hildebrand advised that no general performance indicators were found; however, there were 3 compliance findings not related to financial statements.

Jennifer Herman, Finance Director, informed the Board that although Alexander County's fund balance was adequate and in compliance, it had decreased over the past few years and was not following the trend of other counties with yearly budgets of under $100 million, which had added to their fund balance.

Commissioner Pennell asked Ms. Herman to determine if those same counties had also experienced revaluation and/or had reduced their tax rate.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the FY 2023-2024 Audit Report. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM PROCLAMATION

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve a proclamation declaring December 1-31, 2024 as Christmas in Bethlehem. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the election of Marty Pennell as Chairman for 2025. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed 4/1 (abstention by Commissioner Pennell).

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Chairman Lail made a motion approve the election of Larry Yoder as Vice-Chairman for 2025. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed 4/1 (abstention by Commissioner Yoder).

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #19 - #20

Todd Herms, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #19 - #20 as follows:

Budget Amendment #19 – To increase:

- the Public Buildings budget to purchase property leased by the County to house the offices of Probation & Parole and Pre-Trial / RRS.
- the Governing Body budget for estimated closing costs for the property transaction noted above.
- the Soil & Water budget for a grant from the NC Department of Agriculture and Cultural Services – Farmland Preservation Division to be used for the Cost of Community Services Study.
- the Health Department budget for receipt of a Cabarrus Health Alliance grant.

Budget Amendment #20 – To transfer funds within the County Water & Sewer Fund to purchase property for a booster station for the Bethlehem Water Tank Project which will save the County between $100,000 and $150,000 on grading and retaining wall costs.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #19 - #20. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments ($2,069.71) and Tax Refunds ($34,432.00) for October 28 – November 21, 2024.
B. Minutes from November 4, 2024 Regular Meeting.
C. Line-Item Transfer Report for November 2024.
D. Board / Committee Appointments – Local Emergency Planning Committee.
E. Contract to purchase .322 acres on Shiloh Church Road in the Wittenburg Township to serve as a future pump station site.
F. Contract to purchase property at 81 Highway 16 North to house Probation & Parole and Pretrial / RRS.
G. Resolution to approve the annual bonding of County officials.
H. Proposed revisions to Personnel Policy – Travel Expense and Reimbursement, Employee Work Clothing.

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

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 7:25 PM, the Board transitioned into the Consolidated Human Services Meeting and proceeded as follows:

- Public Comment – there was no one signed up to speak.

- Public Health Report – Billie Walker, Health Director, reviewed the following:

- Current vacancies (Accreditation 37.6) – an engineer and ophthalmologist are still needed on the CHS Advisory Committee and staff vacancies include a School-Based Dental Coordinator (temporary grant position) and a Behavioral Health Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

- Fee approvals (Accreditation 33.6) – Ms. Walker discussed new Local Use Codes (LU Codes) for the primary care clinic and requested approval to add the code list for a variety of physicals and labs to the current fee schedule with one correction – the fee for LU212 College PE with labs should be $100 instead of $10.

  Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the proposed fees effective January 1, 2025 to include the stated correction. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

- Grant updates – Ms. Walker explained that the 2026 Community Health Grant cycle had opened; however, the grant team met and decided not to apply this year due to being denied for the past two years, as well as a decrease in patient numbers. The grant team will re-evaluate during the next grant cycle.

- Health Director performance evaluation and job description review (Accreditation 37.4 and 37.5) – NC Public Health Accreditation standards require approval of the local health director's job description as well as an annual performance evaluation by the CHS Board and CHS Director, which occurred in Closed Session and was approved by a unanimous vote.

- State audits (Accreditation 22.2 and 22.3) – three state audits were conducted this quarter. Child Health and Communicable Disease were both in compliance with only a few areas of improvement recommended. The WIC audit found two compliance issues that required a corrective action plan.

- What's coming – Ms. Walker presented a new initiative from the state for free flu vaccines for farm workers with the slogan "Do it for the herd!" and "Moo, stop the spread of flu!" Letters and brochures have been mailed to all farm owners with information on how to qualify for the free vaccine.

  Commissioner Yoder recommended that staff reach out to ACHS agriculture students as well.

- DSS Report – Keri Jerrell, DSS Director, stated that the current vacancy rate was 8% for the past month and there have been 8 new hires (5 in Economic Services and 3 in Child Protective Services). CPS/APS stats included 56 children in DSS custody, 16 foster homes, and 12 adult wards. There is one adoption pending and 5 more cases are going to the Adoption Committee this month for review with 2-3 of those expected to be finalized in January or February 2025.

- Senior Center Report – Kristy Hunt, Senior Center Director, reviewed recent activities and classes that included a trip to the zoo, health fair, and a feature on Queen City News that aired on September 18. The crocheting class has expanded to twice per week and the cardio drumming class will ride in the Christmas Parade this year. Since Medicare open enrollment began on October 15th, staff has met with approx. 370 seniors about their drug plans.

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

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:57 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adjourn at 8:45 PM. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Joshua D. Lail, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board