

Draft

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING** July 20, 2009

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

**PRESENT:** W. Darrell Robertson, Chairman  
Wes Bolick, Vice-Chairman  
Ryan Mayberry  
Harold M. Odom  
Larry G. Yoder

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

**MEDIA:** Micah Henry, The Taylorsville Times

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, July 20, 2009 in the Catawba Valley Community College / Alexander Center Multipurpose Room, Taylorsville, North Carolina.

**CALL TO ORDER**

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

**INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Guy Kerley, Tax Collector, gave the invocation and also led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Kerley stated that the Tax Office consisted of 8 staff members who were currently in the process of preparing and mailing property tax bills, which would be due September 1, 2009 and past due in January 2010. He noted that the Tax Office had also faced difficulties with the economic crisis and was willing provide guidance and work with citizens.

Commissioner Bolick inquired about the tax collection rate. Mr. Kerley replied that the collection rate for real estate was 97% and 87% for motor vehicles. However, he discussed a possible change in legislation scheduled for 2011 that would require citizens to pay their motor vehicle taxes at the time their tag was renewed, which would increase the collection rate.

Commissioner Mayberry stated that 50% of people unable to make their mortgage payments never contact their bank for help. He suggested information be placed on the PEG channel to inform citizens that the Tax Office would work with them to get their tax bill paid.

## **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Chairman Robertson stated that Agenda Item #2 (Public Hearing – Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority) would not be held because it was not properly advertised.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to adopt the agenda as amended. Commissioner Mayberry seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

The following comments were heard:

### **Highway 127 Bridge**

Rueben Chandler, NCDOT Division 12 Maintenance Engineer, discussed plans to improve the Highway 127 bridge next year in the form of high pressure water blasting for replacement of concrete, replacing joints, repairing approaches, etc. He stated that work would be done between 7:00 PM and 6:00 AM on Sunday – Thursday and that access would be granted for emergency vehicles. Mr. Chandler noted that plans were to begin the project in May or June 2010 and to have it completed within 30 days.

Commissioner Bolick pointed out that the painting on Icard Ridge Road needed to be completed.

### **Senior Center**

Phyllis Douglas asked the Board to reconsider the \$25 per hour rental fee for the AARP and Retired School Personnel, who held their monthly meetings at the Senior Center. She explained that these organizations, along with Penny Church, were responsible for obtaining grants and organizing fundraisers to build the Senior Center many years ago. She also thanked the County for its financial support of the Center.

Patricia Gallagher discussed several concerns she had with the changes for the 2009-2010 budget year including the 35% budget cut for the Senior Center (when the overall County budget was only cut by 9%), plans to run the Center with volunteers who have no knowledge to accurately answer questions or teach classes, no funding to purchase coffee or toiletries or provide food for the bingo brunch, inability to mail the newsletter, loss of SHIP assistance and free tax preparation for seniors, and no out of county trips. She also stated that one of the Senior Center's grants was tied to the number of hours the facility was open, noting that the hours had been cut. Ms. Gallagher pointed out that 1,600 seniors attended programs at the Center each month and she felt these changes could negatively affect them.

Sue Trivette stated that attending events at the Senior Center was the only joy in some seniors' lives and she mentioned that the crocheting and quilting classes helped with

arthritis. She felt that Scott Ross did an excellent job and that the cutbacks were drastic. Ms. Trivette stated that it would be catastrophic to many people if the Center closed.

Karen Hoyle, DSS Director, clarified that the AARP and Retired School Personnel meetings were held during regular business hours and would not be charged the \$25 hourly fee. She also stated that a grant had in fact been cut which paid for food items but noted that \$1,800 from the 2008-2009 budget had been transferred into the Senior Center budget for food purchases. However, she did suggest that dishes be brought in on occasion. Ms. Hoyle assured the group that the trips would continue and that the only noticeable change would be that Mr. Ross would no longer accompany the seniors on the trips. A volunteer driver has been arranged so that Mr. Ross can remain at the Center for administrative duties and organizing events. She also stated that the SHIP program assistance would still be available and even better because DSS staff was being trained to aid seniors.

It was also noted that there had never been any discussions to close the Senior Center. Chairman Robertson suggested the Senior Center Advisory Committee hold monthly meetings and that Ms. Hoyle attend.

## **PUBLIC HEARING – CDBG RESOLUTION FOR PIEDMONT WOOD PRODUCTS**

Sherry Long, WPCOG Community Development Director, stated that this was the second public hearing to discuss a CDBG Entrepreneurial Assistance Grant application. The application to be submitted to the NC Department of Commerce, Division of Community Assistance requests \$250,000 to assist Piedmont Wood Products with their expansion to manufacture hospital furniture. Ms. Long announced that 10 new jobs would be created as a result of this project. CDBG funds will finance approximately 50% of the project costs.

She presented several items for consideration that included a resolution to submit the application for CDBG funding for the Piedmont Wood Products Expansion Project, a citizen participation plan, and a job creation agreement.

Chairman Robertson called the public hearing to order and requested any public comment. There being no comments made, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Odom seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the submitting of the CDBG Entrepreneurial Assistance Grant application for the Piedmont Wood Products Expansion Project as well as the associated resolution, participation plan, and job creation agreement. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

Ms. Long also reported that the WPCOG was a HUD certified counseling agency and could help homeowners struggling with paying their mortgage and/or facing foreclosure. She stated that this service was provided at no charge and that staff had met with 300 families since October

2008, only 3 of which had ended up in foreclosure. She urged citizens to call 322-9191 and ask to speak to the Foreclosure Prevention Department.

## **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY COMMUNITIES PROGRAM**

Sara Day Evans, NC Department of Commerce, presented the Department of Commerce's economic development and planning recommendations for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communities Program based on the results of the survey conducted in November 2008. She reviewed the recommendations which dealt with infrastructure, business development opportunities, workforce development, tourism development and enhancements, planning/development/quality of life enhancements, and educational system enhancements.

She reported that the next step in the process was to develop a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Steering Committee to work with the Department of Commerce to develop a plan and implementation strategy for the economic issues identified. She stated that 23 citizens had responded during the November surveys that they would be interested in serving in such a committee and she noted that those individuals would be contacted in the coming weeks to determine their interest and commitment to participating.

Chairman Robertson stated that Commissioners Yoder and Bolick needed to be added to the list of citizens for the steering committee since the other Board members had been included. Commissioner Bolick felt that retail sales needed to be addressed in these efforts.

## **HISTORY OF CVCC IN ALEXANDER COUNTY**

A slide show presentation on the past, present, and future, of the CVCC / Alexander Center was given. Wayne Wooten, retired Vice-President, discussed the beginnings of the CVCC / Alexander Center in the basement of the former Duke Power building. Linda Graham, Executive Director, reviewed the current class offerings and statistics, noting the steady enrollment increase and the possible need for a higher education technical training center for welding, upholstery, automotive, and other similar trades.

Keith Mackie, CVCC Dean of Instruction, stated that the college was committed to expanding class offerings such as curriculum classes for high school students that would allow them to transfer to a 4-year college as a 2<sup>nd</sup> semester sophomore. He also mentioned the need for an educational training center for citizens transitioning directly from high school into the work force.

Dan Gauthreau, Mitchell Gold-Bob Williams VP of Human Resources, stated that CVCC was an important part of the community, providing education and certification courses that resulted in talented, education individuals that would help a company grow and develop.

Kevin Mann, Craftmaster VP of Operations, stated that all 480 employees at Craftmaster Furniture had received training thanks to CVCC through class and simulation exercises. He felt that CVCC had empowered employees and companies to grow.

Ms. Graham spoke on behalf of David Neff, Shurtape Plant Manager, who could not be present tonight by stating that Shurtape utilized the CVCC / Alexander Center through training for their machinery operators.

Chairman Robertson took a moment to recognize Dr. Josephine Foster who represents Alexander County on the CVCC Board of Trustees along with John Watts.

### **NACO PRESCRIPTION DRUG DISCOUNT CARD UPDATE**

Leeanne Whisnant, Health Director, gave an update on the NACo Prescription Drug Discount Card Program which began in March 2006. She explained that the program was intended for individuals without insurance coverage or for those who have prescriptions not covered by their current plan.

She informed the Board that statistics for June 2009 showed that 305 citizens had benefited from the program with a savings of \$4,178.11. She also reported that a total of 12,100 citizens had used or benefited from the card from March 2006 to June 2009 with a total savings of \$161,227.84.

Ms. Whisnant stated that the card usually saved 20% on average but could be more or less depending on the drug. Information can be obtained at the Health Department, Administration Office, DSS, Senior Center, Employment Security Commission, Library, Bethlehem Branch Library, and at the CVCC/Alexander Center. Citizens can also call the Health Department to have an application mailed to them.

Commissioner Yoder suggested this information be placed on the new PEG channel. Ms. Whisnant responded that a DVD was now available that discussed the program in detail which could be aired on the channel.

### **ANNUAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE REPORT**

Barbara Poole, Veterans Service Officer, provided a basic overview of benefits received for veterans through the Veterans Service Office in 2008, which included:

- 3,786 contacts were made in 2008 compared to 2,966 in 2007.
- From January through June 30, 2009, a total of 2,515 contacts have been made, an increase of 356 contacts over the same timeframe in 2008.

- Increase due to factory closings and layoffs, Vietnam & Korean Veterans reaching retirement age, and returning Iraq Veterans with disabilities.
- Benefits paid to Alexander County Veterans totaled \$9.9 million in 2008, \$7.7 million in 2007, and \$4.0 million in 2006. Includes compensation and pension, insurance and indemnities, education and medical care, and unique care.
- Alexander County received two state scholarships from the NC Division of Veterans Affairs for a total of \$144,000.
- Three remodeling grants of \$4,100 each were used to remodel homes for wheelchair accessibility.
- Three van and accessory grants were used to help purchase or make a van accessible for 100% service connected wheelchair bound veterans.
- Four veterans were placed in a 99-bed unit nursing home in Salisbury.
- There were 437 claims for medical and prescription drug benefits.
- Others assistance provided by the Veterans Service Office includes burial, life insurance, home loans, appeals, securing military medals, military retiree's benefits, and all NC benefits such as special license plates, and fishing and hunting licenses.

Ms. Poole also discussed a recent proposal from Don Horton who requested each county to approve a resolution supporting alternate methods for proving veteran status for Merchant Marines due to the loss of logbooks and other documents.

She explained that the current federal laws adequately addressed the Merchant Marine service and requirements to establish eligibility and she felt it was unfair to grant special benefits to only one branch of service individuals when many others, including WWII, Vietnam, and Korean veterans, have been unable to secure documentation to obtain benefits.

The Board agreed and also felt this issue should be handled at the federal level and not locally.

## **DESIGNATION OF VOTING DELEGATE FOR NCACC ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

Chairman Robertson discussed the need for a Voting Delegate to represent the County at the NCACC Annual Conference scheduled for August 27-30, 2009 in Hickory.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to designate Chairman Robertson as the Voting Delegate. Commissioner Mayberry seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

After discussion of the need for a possible alternate, Commissioner Bolick made a motion to designate Commissioner Mayberry as the Voting Delegate alternate if needed. Commissioner Odom seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

### **JAIL PROJECT UPDATE**

Rick French, County Manager, explained that Jack Hemphill, Jail Architect, had agreed to put the Jail Project on hold for the time being until the County was able to establish funding. Mr. Hemphill also provided a bare bones estimate for a first phase plan which would cost approximately \$7.6 million.

### **NORTHEAST AREA WATER PROJECT**

Rick French, County Manager, stated that work was continuing on Daniels Lumber Road and King Sprinkle Road and that completion of the project was expected in 60-90 days.

### **BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS**

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

**Board of Health** – Reappoint Penny Mitchell, Tiffany Hubbs, and Dwight Shook for 3 years.

**Workforce Development Board** – Appoint Paula Daniels for 2 years.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve the appointments and reappointments as presented. Commissioner Mayberry seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

### **BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENT #1**

Rick French, County Manager, presented Budget Amendment #1 to increase the Senior Center budget to use donations received in the 2008-2009 budget year for activities at the Senior Center in 2009-2010.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendment #1. Commissioner Bolick seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

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

- A. United Way's second annual "Bark in the Park" is scheduled for Saturday, August 1, 2009 at Matheson Park from 10:00 AM until 1:00 PM.
- B. According to the Office of Economic Recovery and Investment, Alexander County has received \$10,410,685 in ARRA (stimulus) funding. However, none of that funding has directly been seen by the County Finance Department. Commissioner Yoder was interested in someone explaining to the Board how stimulus projects were chosen and how funding was to be distributed.

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Tax Release Requests for May \$487.03 and Tax Refund Requests for May \$2,132.11.
- B. Minutes from the June 8, 2009 Work Session, June 15, 2009 Regular Commissioners' Meeting, June 24, 2009 Called Meeting, and June 30, 2009 Called Meeting.
- C. Agreement between Alexander County and Institutional Medical Services, PLLC.

Commissioner Bolick made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

### **CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 4, 5, & 6) TO PREVENT THE DISCLOSURE OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CONTRACTUAL, & PERSONNEL**

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 8:32 PM to prevent the disclosure of confidential information and to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 4, 5, & 6). Commissioner Odom seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adjourn at 9:08 PM. Commissioner Mayberry seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

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W. Darrell Robertson, Chairman

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Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board