

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING March 9, 2020

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: Ryan Mayberry, Chairman
 Larry Yoder, Vice-Chairman
 Dr. Jeff Peal
 Marty Pennell
 Ronnie Reese

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

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, March 9, 2020 in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Reese gave the invocation and Chairman Mayberry led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Vice-Chairman Yoder discussed the recent NACo Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. that he attended along with Chairman Mayberry and County Manager Rick French. Memorable speakers included President Donald Trump, Gen. Colin Powell, U.S. Secretary of Housing & Urban Development Ben Carson, and CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield. Commissioner Yoder also commented on touring the White House and encouraged the public to avoid using plastic grocery bags because of their negative effect on the environment.

Chairman Mayberry pointed out how different President Trump is in person compared to how he is portrayed by the media, noting that Republicans and Democrats alike gave standing ovations many times during his speech. He added that U.S. Senator Chris Coons and U.S. Representative George Connolly also spoke.

Commissioner Reese attended an Opportunity Now Summit in Charlotte on February 7th to learn about opportunity zones (neighborhoods that qualify for investor tax incentives) where President Trump also spoke as well as grand openings for Benbow & Martin Law Office and Lolyann Salon & Spa.

Commissioner Peal felt blessed to live in Alexander County and mentioned the many great people he had met and spoken with over the last month prior to the Primary Election.

Commissioner Pennell recently toured DSS and the Health Department and encouraged other commissioners to do the same. He felt the Board had selected the appropriate person (Leeanne Whisnant) to lead the Consolidated Human Services Agency and was pleased with current renovations.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Craig McLeod, who discussed several ordinance violations on Ridley Ranch Road during the February 3rd Public Comment Period, advised that he planned to spend over \$2 million developing 110 acres in the area and wanted to see the violations addressed. He mentioned the many times he had been reminded by County staff to pull a permit before beginning work, yet pointed out that a building being used as a dwelling moved to Ridley Ranch Road during the Christmas holiday had never applied for a septic permit. Mr. McLeod suggested the County 1) hire a code enforcement officer to investigate and address these types of issues and 2) place a garbage disposal fee on property tax bills instead of charging citizens per trip to the convenience center in an effort to clean up the entire county.

Kathy Ballard with the Alexander/Iredell Guardian ad Litem Program mentioned the need for 8 Alexander County volunteers to serve as advocates for abused and neglected children in the court system. These volunteers speak to judges and court officials on behalf of the child, their wishes, and best interest. She also invited the public to attend a Child Abuse Awareness Month event, sponsored by Guardian ad Litem and Alexander County DSS, being held on the courthouse lawn on April 9th from 12:00-1:00 PM.

TAYLORSVILLE CORE TRAIL PROPOSAL

Meredith Schrum Lerm, Design & Beautification Committee Chair for the Taylorsville Business Association, discussed a proposal for a Taylorsville Core Trail, a half-mile loop in the center of town to promote healthy living and community involvement. Plans are to begin the loop at the northeast corner of the Alexander County Services Center with a designated start marker and trail

map painted in a barn quilt design. The apple core logo will be placed before and after each street crossing for a total of 20 painted logos. Ms. Lerm advised that the TBA hoped to host an annual Core Trail run and to collaborate with businesses and County government to host other community events.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to endorse and support the TBA Taylorsville Core Trail proposal. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BROADBAND PILOT PROGRAM UPDATE

Alan Fitzpatrick, CEO of Open Broadband, gave an update on the Broadband Pilot Program that included the following information:

- 943 citizens have completed website signups.
- Fixed wireless equipment was installed on Linney's Mountain (primary core site) and a poultry farm (hub site) on Little River Church Road. More hub sites are needed to fill gaps (businesses are ideal).
- More than 30 installations have occurred to date, averaging 4-6 per week. Open Broadband hopes to connect 125-150 customers by the end of the pilot program in May.
- Service activations are not based on who signed up first and depend on network readiness, ease of installation, and number of residents served in a specific area.
- Fastest speeds are at locations with line-of-sight to Linney's Mountain. Most speeds outside of Taylorsville will be 25 mbps (10-15 times faster than DSL).
- Open Broadband offers 24x7x365 live support with the call center located in Wilson, NC.
- Remaining funds will be used to expand service in the Hiddenite, Stony Point, and Rocky Face areas thanks to Craftmaster (use of water tower), a hub location on Round Top Mountain, and access to EnergyUnited poles.

After several questions from the Board regarding types of equipment, possible hub locations, and ways to reach citizens with little/no service rather than those who have access to Spectrum, Mr. Fitzpatrick discussed options to further service upon completion of the Broadband Pilot Program such as additional core/hub sites along with public Wi-Fi zones; however, he advised that additional funding in the form of grants, governmental partnerships, etc. would be necessary.

Rick French, County Manager, stated that Golden LEAF funding would be available for economic development projects later this year (which would include broadband). Mr. Fitzpatrick added that Tier 2 counties would be eligible for NC Great Grants in FY 2020-2021.

FEBRUARY 2020 FLOODING EVENT UPDATE

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, gave a report on the February 6th flooding that led to 10 road closures, two swift water rescues, and two animal rescues. A temporary shelter was opened for residents of the Hiddenite Family Campground but because only 3 individuals showed up, hotel rooms and meal vouchers were secured for those individuals through the American Red Cross. Mr. Gillispie thanked organizations involved in the process and response including the Alexander County Sheriff's Office, EMS, Health Department, Inspections, DSS, CERT, Taylorsville Police Department, American Red Cross, all Alexander County volunteer agencies, and Emergency Management staff.

A State of Emergency Proclamation was issued in Alexander County and the Town of Taylorsville. Although the amount of damage does not qualify for FEMA assistance, the County may be able to piggyback on NCDOT who reported over \$14 million in damages.

Mr. Gillispie also discussed recent personnel changes that included his promotion to Public Services Director, Mark Earle's promotion to Fire Marshal / Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator, and the hiring of Garrett Huffman as Emergency Management Coordinator / Assistant Fire Marshal. Mark Howell continues to serve as Emergency Planner / Bioterrorism Coordinator.

NC HEALTH INSURANCE POOL RESOLUTION

Rick French, County Manager, recommended approval of a resolution authorizing participation in the NC Health Insurance Pool, noting that staff had met with representatives for NCHIP in recent weeks and negotiated a 3% increase in health insurance benefits for the 2020-2021 budget year. He explained that NCHIP was an insurance pool available to NC counties and municipalities with 100 or more employees that offers more stable/predictable cost increases ranging from 2-5% yearly (current coverage was quoted at a 7% increase for the coming year). Coverage will remain with Blue Cross Blue Shield and will include a lower deductible.

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the NC Health Insurance Pool Resolution. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #38 - #42

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #38 - #43 as follows:

Budget Amendment #38 – To increase the Detention Center budget for the County's share of juvenile detention costs (split 50/50 with the State) due to more juveniles and more days per person served.

Budget Amendment #39 – To increase the Cooperative Extension budget for shared participation with Wilkes and Caldwell Counties for the Visit NC Farm app.

Budget Amendment #40 – To increase the DSS budget for additional Social Services Block Grant funding for Adult Protective Services and purchase one set of automatic doors for DSS building entrance.

Budget Amendment #41 – To increase the Library budget for donations received.

Budget Amendment #42 – To adjust the Bethlehem Sewer Fund budget for the FY 2020 sewer rate schedule based on year-to-date revenue reports from the City of Hickory.

Budget Amendment #43 – To budget for the close-out of the Alexander County Services Center Project and transfer the remaining cash balance of local funds back to the General Fund.

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #38 - #43. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

Rick French, County Manager, requested the reappointment of Glenn Deal Jr. and Carol Biggs to the WPCOG Adult Care & Nursing Home Community Advisory Committee for 3-year terms.

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

OTHER BUSINESS

The following issues were discussed during Other Business:

- A. Rick French, County Manager, reported that a preconstruction meeting for the Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project was scheduled for March 16th and a bid opening for the Stony Point Elementary School CDBG-I Sewer Project on March 13th.
- B. County staff members recently met with Ridley Ranch Road property owners regarding ordinance violations. Cleanup efforts are currently underway.
- C. Commissioner Peal mentioned revamping the Commissioner's Task Force on Drug & Alcohol Addiction or establishment of a similar committee due to ongoing problems with addictive substances. He felt the group had been very productive when they were active.

Therefore, he made a motion to investigate the establishment of a committee to focus on addictive behaviors with possible appointment in April. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

- D. The ABC Board request presentation scheduled for tonight's meeting has been postponed until April.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Minutes from the February 3, 2020 Regular Meeting.
- B. Tax Release Requests (\$3,415.88) and Tax Refunds (\$4,263.45) for January 24 – February 29, 2020.
- C. Alexander County JCPC Funding Plan FY 2021.
- D. Surplus a 1994 Freightliner road tractor, VIN #1FUPFDYB2SH649130 with 1,624,306 miles; a 2008 Chevy Trailblazer, VIN #1GNDDT13S282237303 with 178,000 miles; and a 1999 Chevy C2500, VIN# 1GBGC24R9XF050160 with 141,685 miles.

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

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

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

- Announcement – Leeanne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, mentioned a free viewing of “Suicide: The Ripple Effect” on Wednesday, March 25th at 6:00 PM at the ACHS Auditorium. The documentary chronicles the life of Kevin Hines who at age 19 attempted to take his life by jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge. Vaya Health is sponsoring the event in an effort to educate and save lives.
- Public Comment – there was no one signed up to speak.
- Health Department Report – Billie Walker, Assistant Health Director, reviewed the following:
 - COVID 19 / Coronavirus – this is a new strain of an old virus causing death mainly in elderly or immune-compromised individuals. Symptoms are similar to the flu and can lead to pneumonia. Ms. Walker advised that the best way to prevent COVID 19 was the same as any other virus (wash hands, avoid close contact, stay home if sick, use disinfectants, don't touch face with unwashed hands, don't travel to areas with known cases, and DON'T PANIC). Staff has met with the School System and are prepared to react.
 - Annual Provider Update for Family Planning – Ms. Walker discussed the Family Planning Title X requirements and gave a provider update to the Board, which included all in-house providers (Dr. Goodnight, Dr. Kepley, and Emily Cook, FNP). A 6-month overview of total family planning numbers was reviewed as well

types of birth control options available and statistics related to birth control. Ms. Walker also mentioned recent renovation efforts (expanded two clinic rooms to 5 with a separate ultrasound and immunization room as well as a teen-friendly room with a phone charging station and teen-related educational material.

- DSS Report – Ms. Whisnant reviewed the following:
 - NCDHHS MOU Update – a February 17th letter from Susan Osborne, NCDHHS Assistant Secretary for County Operations, reported that no NC counties will be issued formal corrective actions this year due to several problems on the State level including lack of accurate data sets and dashboard along with errors and inaccurate reports.
 - REDA Medicaid Audit – of the 20 cases pulled in January (10 active, 10 denied/terminated), only two internal control errors were found (due to cases not being processed timely, failure to address a vehicle, and failure to evaluate client for all Medicaid programs). However, no paybacks are required.
 - Block Grant Funding – due to an increase in adult protective services cases, Alexander County DSS received an additional \$11,386 in Social Services Block Grant funding that will be used for salaries.
 - Energy Assistance Programs – thanks to outreach efforts in January notifying the public of DSS’s energy assistance programs, remaining funds were spent in 6 days. After two requests for additional funding, \$10,000 was received.
 - Foster & Adoption Programs – the largest Foster/Adopt Parents Class began in February. Staff is working with the Guardian ad Litem Program on outreach and a community education campaign and is using underutilized State incentive funds to provide additional classes.
 - Assistant DSS Director Interviews – Ms. Whisnant reported that the interview process was now complete. HR is reviewing final candidates and a recommendation will be provided to the Board soon.
 - Closed Session – N.C.G.S. 143.318.11(a)(1) HIPAA Privacy Rule 45 CFR Parts 160 & 164 / N.C.G.S. 132-12 – Ms. Whisnant requested discussion of bad debt write-offs / Medicaid cost settlements during Closed Session.

Chairman Mayberry requested Ms. Whisnant provide the number of children aging out of foster care (that have not been adopted) at the next meeting as well as what resources were available to assist them with the transition to adulthood. Ms. Whisnant mentioned the LINKS Program (designed to provide a network of services for self-sufficiency), but replied that she would provide additional information.

Commissioner Peal commended Ms. Whisnant for her leadership and progress made since the creation of the Consolidated Human Services Agency. Ms. Whisnant gave credit to the dedicated staff at DSS.

CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 4, & 6) HIPAA PRIVACY RULE 45 CFR PARTS 160 & 164 / N.C.G.S. 132-12, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & PERSONNEL

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 8:05 PM to discuss bad debt write-offs / Medicaid cost settlements, economic development, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1, 4 & 6). Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Peal made a motion to adjourn at 8:51 PM. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Ryan N. Mayberry, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board