

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING May 4, 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, May 4, 2020 via Zoom in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice-Chairman Yoder gave the invocation and Commissioner Peal led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Vice-Chairman Yoder attended the WPCOG TAC Meeting last week via Zoom where members learned that a decrease in motor fuels tax, highway use tax, and DMV fees due to COVID-19 would result in more than \$300 million in lost revenue in the NCDOT budget for FY 2019-2020. An additional shortfall of approximately \$370 million is projected for FY 2020-2021, which will prohibit right-of-way purchases and new project contracts. He also mentioned that counties would see a delay in revenue from vehicle taxes because of a 6-month extension for registration renewals.

Commissioner Peal asked about the status of the Liledoun Road bridge, which remains closed. Vice-Chairman Yoder replied that NCDOT should make a decision this month.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Commissioner Peal made a motion to add a proclamation requesting Governor Roy Cooper to allow Alexander County businesses to reopen as Agenda Item #1A. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, read comments submitted by Craig McLeod regarding accumulation of trash, junk, and untagged/inoperable vehicles on several properties located on Ridley Ranch Road. Mr. McLeod states only one commissioner has responded to the numerous emails he has sent since September 2019, which was from Chairman Mayberry who wrote “this is a small county...these things take time.” He feels these are small issues that could easily be addressed by enforcement of the County’s ordinances.

PROCLAMATION REQUESTING REOPENING OF ALEXANDER COUNTY BUSINESSES

After a reading by Commissioner Peal, Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the proclamation requesting Governor Roy Cooper to allow Alexander County businesses to reopen. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Chairman Mayberry also signed a letter last week requesting Governor Cooper to give counties the authority to set their own restrictions surrounding COVID-19 and make decisions necessary to minimize negative effects on their local economy while also protecting the health and safety of their citizens.

2020-2021 ALEXANDER COUNTY PROPOSED BUDGET MESSAGE

Rick French, County Manager, provided the following Budget Message for the 2020-2021 Alexander County proposed budget:

The proposed General Fund budget for Alexander County for fiscal year 2020-2021 totals \$42,892,442. There is no property tax increase included in the proposed budget. There are no tax increases in fire districts and no fee increases for building inspections, zoning, or fire inspections. Requests from County departments for the upcoming budget year totaled \$45,962,100. The original budget for 2019-2020 totaled \$41,983,958 and currently stands at \$43,697,216. There was also no property tax increase last year.

The recommended General Fund budget for 2020-2021 includes the following items that are a continuation of existing expenses from 2019-2020.

- 2.5% COLA approved in January 2020 \$356,000
 - FICA increase associated with the January 2020 COLA \$27,000
 - FY 2021 increase in retirement contribution rates \$155,000
 - FY 2021 increase in health insurance \$231,840
 - FY 2021 increase in retiree health insurance \$54,573
 - FY 2021 appropriation increase to Alexander County Schools \$265,060
- Total: \$1,089,473

The 2.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) approved in January 2020 went into effect during FY 2020. It is approximately \$356,000 and the resulting increase in FICA tax is \$27,000. The retirement contribution rate set by the State of NC is increasing from 9.04% to 10.24% for general employees and from 9.70% to 10.84% for law enforcement officers. As noted above, these increases total \$155,000. The 3% increase in health insurance costs is \$231,840 while health insurance costs for retirees increased \$54,573. The increase recommended for Alexander County Schools is \$265,060.

County departments requested over \$1,300,000 in capital outlay. Certain capital outlay items that are included in the 2020-2021 proposed budget have been placed in contingency line items for each department. They include the following:

- Replace light poles at Bethlehem Park \$100,000
- Replace 4 DSS vehicles \$90,000
- EMS Ambulance box on new chassis \$100,000
- Replace 4 Sheriff's Office vehicles / equipment \$230,000
- Replace DARE vehicle \$57,500
- Replace Emergency Services vehicle \$56,000
- Replace 911 radio transmitter \$25,000
- Linney's Mountain tower upgrade \$40,000
- Off-site disaster recovery node \$98,500
- CVCC security cameras at both buildings \$20,000
- Replace zero turn mower \$10,000

There are no new employees, either full or part-time, in the budget. There are no salary increases and travel, training, and education line items are being held to the 2019-2020 budget standards.

The City of Hickory is proposing a 3.75% increase for the new budget year effective July 1, 2020. This is subject to approval by the Hickory City Council as a component of the budget. Water connections were reduced from \$1,143 to \$541 in June 2019. County staff recommends this continue until June 30, 2021. New water taps must connect to the Alexander County Water System and may not be purchased and held for future use. Water connection fees will increase back to \$1,143 or the Hickory inside rate on July 1, 2021.

The Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project began in April 2020 and should be completed by the end of the new fiscal year or June 30, 2021. Sewer rates and connection fees will remain at the same level with the City of Hickory for the 2020-2021 budget.

The 2020-2021 budget will see the development, construction, and completion of 3 substantial utility projects. The Alexander County Water System Extension Project, Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project, and Stony Point Elementary School CDBG-I Sewer Project will add hundreds of customers and increase development.

The economic and revenue impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is both severe and uncertain. All primary revenue sources will be impacted as a result of extremely reduced consumer activity and the corresponding economic downturn. It is impossible to make solid predictions because there are so many unknown factors, including what types of fiscal support the federal and state government will provide. The NCACC and NACo recommend very conservative budgets.

The next step in our budget process is the public hearing on May 18, 2020 at 6:00 pm.

Mr. French advised that 14 employees had been requested by County departments, two of which are seasonal Elections workers that have been included in the proposed budget. He recommended the abovementioned capital outlay items be held until January 2021 when staff could determine the financially feasible due to COVID-19 impacts.

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to schedule the budget public hearing on May 18, 2020 as suggested. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Leeanne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, reported that Alexander County had a 5th confirmed positive case of COVID-19 that is linked to Tyson Foods in Wilkesboro, NC. The individual only felt ill for 3 days and remains at home in quarantine. She pointed out that all 5 of our cases had originated outside of the county, all had no or mild symptoms, and there has been no transmission to household contacts to date. Staff is working with local daycares and businesses to develop plans to reopen that focus on keeping employees safe and mitigating risks. Ms. Whisnant mentioned that the CDC had expanded symptoms to include sore throat, headache, muscle aches, and loss of taste/smell. All but one NC counties have positive COVID-19 cases.

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, reported an increase in EMS calls over the last two weeks and stated that over 8,000 surgical masks had been provided to local entities through the County EOC including the Health Department, DSS, several County offices, Hospice, Medi Home Health, Valley Nursing, and Taylorsville House. EMS received a portion of the Cares Act Provider Relief Fund and no-touch thermometers ordered 6 weeks ago were finally delivered.

Rick French, County Manager, advised that Rocky Face Park reopened on May 1st with operating hours of 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Restrooms, picnic shelters, and the playground remain closed and

no rock climbing or camping is allowed. Approximately 100 people hiked trails this past Sunday. He also mentioned that the License Plate Agency reopened today. Employee shields are in place and social distancing is being enforced. Mr. French stated that all County departments were back to work with the exception of the Senior Center, which would remain closed for a bit longer. There are also no Recreation sports taking place as of yet.

Chairman Mayberry felt this pandemic would cause many businesses to move from China back to the U.S. and also result in Americans buying more products made in the U.S. David Icenhour, Economic Development Director, agreed and discussed the importance of Alexander County having available buildings and sites for those businesses/industries.

Commissioner Pennell pointed out that one large manufacturer in Alexander County had announced a permanent layoff of over 200 employees. He urged those affected to contact other industries within the county, noting that many of them had discussed vacancies during the commissioners' monthly industry visits.

NATIONAL EMS WEEK PROCLAMATION

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, requested approval of a proclamation declaring the week of May 17-23, 2020 as National Emergency Medical Services Week with the theme EMS Strong is "Ready Today, Preparing for Tomorrow."

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the National EMS Week proclamation. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

LATE FEE WAIVER FOR BUSINESS PERSONAL PROPERTY

Rick French, County Manager, explained that, due to the IRS filing period extension and many accountants not meeting with clients in person because of COVID-19, the Tax Office is requesting the Board to consider waiving late fees for business personal property. Waivers will be collected and presented to the Board for approval as a Consent Agenda item at a future meeting.

The Board agreed to allow late fee waivers for business personal property as requested.

COURTHOUSE PARK MASTER PLAN

David Icenhour, Economic Development Director, requested approval of the Alexander County Courthouse Park Master Plan that included a project overview, site analysis, land use and zoning, topography, and community input. He advised that presentations were made to the Taylorsville Business Association and Taylorsville Rotary Club prior to the COVID-19 epidemic but a community meeting was cancelled due to Executive Order 121 issued by Governor Cooper. However, because the meeting was scheduled and public comments were captured on Facebook, this PARTF grant application requirement has been fulfilled.

Plans for the Courthouse Park include a splash pad, playground, and performance stage along with game court fields, benches, lighting, and the Charters of Freedom monuments donated by Foundation Forward. The budget estimate for the park totals \$833,037 (\$700,035/construction, \$35,002/contingency, \$98,000/engineering, site planning, and survey). Staff plans to apply for a \$400,000 PARTF grant that requires a 50/50 match or the remaining \$433,037 to be paid by the County.

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the Courthouse Park Master Plan. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #54 - #56

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #54 - #56 as follows:

Budget Amendment #54 – To budget for planning services for the Courthouse Park Master Plan and assistance with the PARTF grant application.

Budget Amendment #55 – To adjust revenue line items based on revised projections for the remainder of the budget year.

Budget Amendment #56 – To close out the Industrial Shell Building Project and transfer the remaining cash balance to the General Fund.

Commissioner Peal made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #54 - #56. Commissioner Pennell the motion, which passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

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

- A. A preconstruction meeting for the Stony Point Elementary School CDBG-I Sewer Project was held on April 28, 2020. Work will begin this month.
- B. The Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project began last week, a little earlier than planned.
- C. The next Consolidated Human Services Board Meeting will be on May 18th following the regular Commissioners' Meeting.
- D. This morning Governor Cooper signed SB 704 and HB 1043 that provides \$1.57 billion in regulatory and financial relief to NC counties.

In recognition of Teacher/School Staff Appreciation Week, Commissioner Peal thanked all School System employees for continuing to provide education services to students.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Minutes from the April 6, 2020 Regular Commissioners' Meeting.
- B. Tax Release Requests (\$677.21) and Tax Refunds for March 28 – April 24, 2020.

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

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

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:23 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Mayberry made a motion to adjourn at 7:49 PM. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Ryan N. Mayberry, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board