

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING**     June 1, 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, June 1, 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**

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

**COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Commissioner Peal read a letter written by Danilynn H. Rumble, a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Stony Point Elementary, who discussed the need for various youth activities in Alexander County. Suggestions included a bowling alley, arcade, skate park, or educational facility to learn about animals and nature. She mentioned the many abandoned buildings in the county that could be converted to a hangout area and felt schools could assist with fundraising efforts. Commissioner Peal applauded Miss Rumble for sharing her ideas, noting that many new recreational opportunities were in the works.

At last week's WPCOG TAC Meeting, Vice-Chairman Yoder learned that NCDOT planned to push both the Industrial Park access road and County Home Road / Highway 16 South intersection projects to 2022. No update was provided on Liledoun Road. He advised that mowing of right-of-ways and road sides was scheduled to begin today.

Chairman Mayberry received a reply from Governor Roy Cooper following a letter requesting that counties be given authority to set their own restrictions surrounding COVID-19. Governor Cooper assured Chairman Mayberry that the phased approach was being guided by the advice of public health officials and that easing of restrictions would continue on a statewide basis.

## **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Chairman Mayberry requested the addition of two resolutions, one to designate an official to make recommendations to the ABC Commission and another to appoint a review officer, as Agenda Item #2A.

Commissioner Reese 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 abandoned/unlicensed/uninspected vehicles, mobile home frames, and piles of trash, junk, steel, old tires, etc. along Ridley Ranch Road. Mr. McLeod states that he began requesting assistance in September 2019 for enforcement of County ordinances and cleanup of what he feels is 20 plus years of non-compliance. He received one response from Chairman Mayberry who insisted he be patient; however, he asked how much longer it would take for the County to complete its task.

## **ADOPTION OF 2020-2021 ALEXANDER COUNTY BUDGET ORDINANCE**

Rick French, County Manager, presented the 2020-2021 Alexander County Budget Ordinance that totaled \$42,892,442 and requested approval.

Chairman Mayberry stated that this was a reasonable budget given the uncertainties of how COVID-19 would affect County finances and he thanked Mr. French and staff for their efforts. He felt the pandemic would negatively impact sales tax revenues fairly soon.

Commissioner Peal thanked County staff for their understanding in the Board's no nonsense approach to the 2020-2021 budget, noting that he believed the biggest fallout surrounding the pandemic was several months out.

Commissioner Reese agreed and reiterated that that the Board would re-evaluate capital items placed in Contingency in January 2021.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the 2020-2021 Budget Ordinance. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **RESOLUTION REGARDING THE DESIGNATION OF AN OFFICIAL TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NC ABC COMMISSION ON ABC PERMIT APPLICATIONS**

Chairman Mayberry explained that this resolution designated Seth Harris, Zoning Administrator, as the County official to sign off on ABC permit applications before going to the ABC Commission for final approval.

Commissioner Peal made a motion to approve the resolution designating Seth Harris, Zoning Administrator, to sign off on ABC permit applications. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **RESOLUTION APPOINTING A REVIEW OFFICER FOR ALEXANDER COUNTY**

Chairman Mayberry recommended approval of a resolution appointing Virginia Austin as a Review Officer to review plats before they are recorded by the Register of Deeds.

Commissioner Peal made a motion to approve the resolution appointing Virginia Austin as a Review Officer. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **COVID-19 UPDATE**

Leeanne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, reported a significant increase in positive COVID-19 cases since the last meeting bringing the cumulative total for Alexander County to 42 (14 active, 2 hospitalized, no deaths). Although an increase was expected with the “Safer at Home” Phase 2 as well as more testing, she expressed concern with the big jump over the weekend as they were all community acquired and not related to the Tyson Foods outbreak. In addition, many new cases are children, teenagers, or asymptomatic. For these reasons, she recommended that recreation sports and use of athletic fields for practice be prohibited for the time being and re-evaluated at the next meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>. Health Department staff are scheduling all tests once per day in an effort to maximize use of limited PPE.

Chairman Mayberry mentioned that restaurant workers who did not sanitize or change gloves after each customer were possibly contributing to the spread of the virus. Ms. Whisnant stated that Environmental Health staff was working with restaurants to educate and monitor, noting that many local establishments had taken part in offered training.

Commissioner Peal asked for guidance on whether the public should wear a mask, pointing out that CDC recommended them but the World Health Organization did not. Ms. Whisnant explained that wearing a face covering protected someone from spreading the virus to others; however, the best way to protect yourself is social distancing and hand washing/sanitizing. She felt the at-risk population should definitely wear a mask in public but advised that they were not necessary in a vehicle or when alone. Citizens should avoid touching their face when wearing gloves and they should be removed or sanitized before eating, touching a vehicle steering wheel, etc.

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, stated that over 15,000 pieces of surgical masks/PPE had been provided to several local organizations through the County EOC as well as 20 gallons of hand sanitizer. Efforts continue to obtain needed supplies. He mentioned that NC Emergency Management was preparing for the upcoming hurricane season as well as protesting events.

Rick French, County Manager, advised that the court system resumed today with precautions (extra cleaning, masks required, and social distancing). He also felt a decision to open County offices to the public should be postponed and discussed on June 15<sup>th</sup>.

In response to a question by Commissioner Pennell related to the number of tests performed versus positive cases, Mr. Gillispie reported that 29,263 or 6.93% of the 421,908 tests performed in NC were positive, which is a slight decrease from 8.11% on May 5<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Whisnant also pointed out that some labs/medical facilities were offering antibody testing but at taxpayer expense.

#### **HIRING OF FAMILY MEMBER / APPROVAL FOR SHERIFF**

Rick French, County Manager, advised that Acting Chief of Police Douglas Bowman was sworn in as a part-time deputy for the Sheriff's Office on May 18, 2020. Staff determined once the payroll change form was received that, pursuant to N.C.G.S. 153A-103, the hiring of a relative to the Sheriff or Register of Deeds by blood or marriage of nearer kinship than first cousin requires approval by the Board of Commissioners.

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the hiring of Douglas Bowman, son of Sheriff Chris Bowman, as a part-time Sheriff's deputy. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

#### **REINSTATEMENT OF CONVENIENCE SITE FEES**

Rick French, County Manager, reported a loss of more than \$51,000 in revenue since March 20<sup>th</sup> when convenience site fees were waived due to COVID-19 and therefore requested all fees be reinstated effective June 3, 2020.

Chairman Mayberry asked that extra precautions be taken by employees to prevent the spread of germs such as wearing masks, hand sanitizing, etc.

Vice-Chairman Yoder felt more notice should be given to citizens and suggested newspaper and radio ads.

After discussion, Chairman Mayberry made a motion to reinstate convenience site fees effective June 10, 2020. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER AGREEMENT**

Rick French, County Manager, explained that the two-year NCDPI School Safety Grant for a Resource Officer at Hiddenite and Stony Point Elementary Schools would expire soon. The School System is interested in reapplying for the grant and a continued partnership with the County to provide the officer. Mr. French advised that this would not require additional funding from the County (officer is already an employee and needed equipment has been purchased).

Commissioner Peal made a motion to support the School System's grant application and the continued partnership for a School Resource Officer. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #60 & #61**

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #60 & #61 as follows:

Budget Amendment #60 – To adjust the DSS budget for fees received to perform adoption home studies.

Budget Amendment #61 – To adjust revenue line items in several departments based on revised projections for the remainder of the budget year (Governing Body, Detention, Inspections, and Senior Center).

Commissioner Pennell made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #60 & #61. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS**

Rick French, County Manager, requested that Christine Gates, Julie Sebastian, Leanne Whisnant, Bonnie Simms, Geraldine Perry, and Douglas Howes be reappointed to the Council on Aging, all for 3-year terms.

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

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

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

- A. The Independence Day Celebration fireworks display on July 11<sup>th</sup> will need to be rescheduled.

- B. House Bill 1169 was filed on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Key highlights include several changes to absentee voting as well as additional funding from the CARES Act and HAVA.
- C. A letter was received from Bill Chapman, SWCD Board Chairman, requesting a newer 4-wheel drive vehicle for Soil & Water staff. Arrangements are being made for use of a current County vehicle.
- D. The ABC Board will hold a public hearing on June 25<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 PM in the Bethlehem Fire & Rescue Meeting Room to present their 2020-2021 budget.
- E. In lieu of cash compensation, 10 sewer taps will be provided to locations where sewer easements were needed as part of the Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project. Funds for these taps will be taken from Contingency in the project budget.
- F. Engineer Dan Shabeldeen has negotiated with NCDOT to open cut Spencer Woods Lane instead of bore and jack, saving approximately \$15,000.
- G. Crews have located a manhole near Wittenburg Access that has deteriorated and must be replaced, costing approximately \$15,000 which will also be taken from Contingency in the project budget.

Chairman Mayberry asked for a status update on the Dusty Ridge Park / Wittenburg Access Projects. Mr. French replied that Duke Energy was interested in financially contributing to trail development and that staff was awaiting costs estimates from McGill Associates. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in trash and litter at both parks.

#### **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Minutes from the May 11, 2020 Budget Work Session and May 18, 2020 Regular Commissioners' Meeting.
- B. CARES NC Application for I-CARE CSBG funding for Iredell and Alexander Counties for 2020-2021.
- C. Tax Release Requests (\$503.88) and Tax Refunds (\$8,983.86) for April 25 – May 21, 2020.

Commissioner Reese a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Peal 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 7:00 PM to discuss 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, Commissioner Reese made a motion to adjourn at 7:24 PM. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

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Ryan N. Mayberry, Chairman

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Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board