

Draft

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING**      November 2, 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, November 2, 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 Vice-Chairman Yoder led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE / SPECIAL COMMENTS**

A moment of silence was held in memory of W. Darrell Robertson, former Alexander County Commissioner and Engineer, who passed away on November 1, 2020.

Several Board members made comments related to Mr. Robertson's service and contribution to Alexander County and the Stony Point community as well as ways he had impacted them personally. Prayers were requested for Mr. Robertson's family.

**COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Vice-Chairman Yoder reported that, during the October WPCOG TAC Meeting, it was announced that NCDOT planned to begin the Liledoun Road repairs this week with anticipated completion

no later than January 2021; however, he felt the damage from last week's storm may delay the project by a few days.

Commissioner Reese thanked all emergency personnel and volunteer organizations that responded and assisted during the storm caused by Tropical Storm Zeta.

Chairman Mayberry stated that it had been an honor to serve as an Alexander County Commissioner for the past 12 years and he conveyed his appreciation and thanks to all current and past Board members, County Manager Rick French, Clerk to the Board Jamie Starnes, County department heads, and citizens. *\*\*\*Due to COVID-19, a formal recognition will take place in the spring of 2021\*\*\**

## **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Chairman Mayberry requested the addition of a Storm Damage Report as Agenda Item #1A.

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

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no one present to speak during the Public Comment Period.

## **OCTOBER 2020 STORM DAMAGE REPORT**

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, provided a photo slide show of damage caused by heavy winds and rain that occurred on Thursday, October 29, 2020 from the remnants of Tropical Storm Zeta. Twenty-five homes sustained structural damage and significant flooding in the Ellendale area washed out several driveways/culverts, requiring construction of footbridges to provide citizens access to their property. Multiple roads throughout the county were blocked or closed due fallen trees, downed power lines, and flooding and a shelter was opened at the Ellendale Volunteer Fire Department for a few hours.

He reported that 427 calls were taken and processed by 911 Communications from 8:00 AM until 4:00 PM and approx. 10,000 Alexander County residents were left without power (less than 50 remain as of 5:00 PM today). Emergency personnel provided oxygen assistance to 10 citizens over a 3-day period.

To be eligible for FEMA funding, a State of Emergency was declared on Friday morning. Mr. Gillispie thanked all County staff, State departments, volunteers, and the many rescue organizations that assisted during the storm.

## **PUBLIC HEARING: 5310 GRANT ENHANCEMENT FOR SENIORS & THE DISABLED**

Leeanne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, discussed the Federal 5310 Program (Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities) for FY 2022 that will provide Alexander County seniors age 65 and older as well as disabled citizens with transportation services to medical appointments and other life sustaining activities through Greenway Public Transportation. The grant project budget totals \$194,592 and requires a 10% local match. Ms. Whisnant advised that this grant had been utilized annually for many years and, if approved tonight, would be included in the 2021-2022 DSS budget request.

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

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve the 5310 Program Grant application for FY 2022 and the coinciding resolution. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BETHLEHEM SEWER EXTENSION PROJECT REPORT**

Engineer Dan Shabeldeen provided a progress report on the Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project that included the following information:

- Crew #1 with Two Brothers Utilities, LLC has completed the bore under Highway 127 at Chigger Ridge Road and is now at Davis Cove Road. Manholes #15 and #17, both approx. 24 feet deep, have been set with no issues.
- Crew #2 has completed the north end of Shiloh Church Road, west side of Rink Dam Road, and bore under Highway 127 at The Vault. Manholes have also been set at the southeast corner of Highway 127 and Rink Dam. This crew has been stalled for a few weeks due to testing positive for COVID-19, but work will pick back up later this week.
- In the next 30 days, Crew #1 will continue installing pipe along Chigger Ridge Road from Davis Cove to Rink Dam. Crew #2 will continue along Rink Dam and once finished, will begin on force main from the Heritage Village Pump Station.
- A total of 11,820 linear feet of pipe and 46 manholes have been installed as of October 23, 2020.

Mr. Shabeldeen reported that 50% of construction was complete at 60% of the project timeline; however, he noted that progress would increase once crews finished the gravity sewer portions and began installing force main.

## **COURTHOUSE PARK & WITTENBURG ACCESS PROJECTS**

Michael Norris, Director of Land Planning & Recreation with McGill Associates, presented the Courthouse Park Master Plan that included construction of a performance stage, grading and site development of the spectator area, and pedestrian connectivity (sidewalks and ADA access) as Phase 1. He advised that a future phase would allow for a splash pad, playground, picnic shelter, game courts, trellis swings, and additional pedestrian connectivity. The County can reapply for PARTF grant funds in 2021.

For the Wittenburg Access Improvements Project, Mr. Norris reported that Duke Energy planned to develop a swim beach and construct restrooms, picnic shelter/table areas, a peninsula trail, and additional parking. Alexander County will have the responsibility of adding a hiking trail, benches/sitting areas, and additional parking. He explained that because Duke's portion of this project was currently in the design phase, no construction timeframe has been set; however, the County can begin construction in early 2021.

## **REQUEST FOR RECLASSIFICATION OF REGISTER OF DEEDS POSITIONS**

Scott Hines, Register of Deeds, reviewed the functions and services provided by the Alexander County Register of Deeds Office and the need for job classification upgrades. He presented a slide show that included the following:

- Average monthly revenues collected for excise taxes, recording fees, etc. (total collected for 2020 calendar year expected to exceed \$500,000).
- Comparison of Register of Deeds salaries vs. other County positions as well as CPI increases since 2009.
- Requested classification changes (Register of Deeds from Grade 73 to 77, Assistant Register of Deeds from Grade 63 to 65, and Deputy Register of Deeds from Grade 62 to 64).

Mr. Hines felt Register of Deeds staff members were underpaid given the amount of responsibility, importance of these positions, and high level of legality required, especially when considering that the Register of Deeds was elected and staff were appointed public officers, which distinguished them from other County personnel.

## **RIDLEY RANCH ROAD PRESENTATION**

In response to complaints regarding code/ordinance violations along Ridley Ranch Road in Hiddenite, Chief Building Inspector Bill Rogers gave an update on recent progress, noting that updated letters were sent to property owners on August 5, 2020 requesting clean-up efforts. He provided photos taken on October 19<sup>th</sup> and relevant information that included:

- Although the driving conditions of Ridley Ranch Road are poor, there is no trash or debris littering the roadway and the legal right-of-way is clear of obstructions.

- 114 Ridley Ranch Road is a 7.46 acre owned by Steve Riddle tract with a single-family residence and multiple outbuildings/structures that would likely be considered for agricultural use. Two vehicles and a travel trailer (camper) were found on the property; however, none were checked for valid tags as the property owner has no trespassing signs posted. The property is gated and no debris was found within the right-of-way.
- 284 Ridley Ranch Road, owned by Gloria Rogers, contains an unoccupied primitive dovetail log home that is more than 100 years old. The property owner has attempted to preserve the structure, work that would not require any type of building permit but due to its current condition, staff believes the structure will not stand very long. Because the primary residence does not have electricity, the owner collects rain water and has several water barrels on the property. A small trailer for hauling trash was also observed.
- A travel trailer (camper) and old pole barn / horse shed is located on property owned by Ronald Tilley (no address issued).
- A truck and small trailer holding a rain or fuel barrel is parked on property owned by Danny Stutts, also marked with no trespassing signs (no address issued).
- Staff cannot determine ownership of an abandoned school bus and small, untagged trailer located in a wooded area just off the right-of-way without assistance from a surveyor.
- The Crumpler / Drum properties consist of 6 total tracts, 5 without County-issued addresses and one located at 1612 Ridley Ranch Road. Although additional clean-up work is still needed, significant progress has been made since February 2020 including removal of a 5 foot high x 30 foot circumference trash pile. The property owners report having hauled away more than 50 dump truck loads of trash/debris and arrangements are being made to have an abandoned RV removed. The main residence has running water from a nearby creek but no electricity, so solar lighting is used. Photos of remaining areas of concerns were shown, including an outbuilding with old tires, tarps, etc. Mr. Rogers pointed out that the radio/speaker was used as an alarm to alert the property owner when his electric horse fence was unplugged. No trash/debris remains within the right-of-way.
- 1752 Ridley Ranch Road consists of 3 tracts (one without a County-issued address) owned by John & Martha Webster who reside in another county. The residence is currently vacant but staff is attempting to contact the previous tenant to address clean-up and removal of vehicles and household garbage.

Mr. Rogers explained that the citizens who reside on Ridley Ranch Road live a very rural life, mostly “off the grid” but had all had been very cooperative and worked hard to be in compliance. He did report wild dogs in the area that were aggressive in nature, but felt a significant amount of progress had been made since his first site visit in 2019.

## **COVID-19 UPDATE**

Leeanne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, reported that Alexander County's cumulative total for positive COVID-19 cases was now at 973 (154+ known quarantined, 23 hospitalized, 10 deaths, 786 recovered). She explained that "known" quarantined had been added since many medical providers were quarantining whole households, information that is not readily shared with the Health Department. There have been several confirmed clusters which was expected with the start of flu season (one at a school, one from a funeral, a couple churches, and an outbreak at the NC DOC prison due to a transfer of two positive inmates from another facility). Ms. Whisnant pointed out that testing turnaround was improving, some as quickly as two days.

Doug Gillispie, Public Services Director, advised that, after taking part in necessary training, first responders were now being allowed to assist with critical patient calls, a process that was placed on hold in April due to the PPE shortage. EMS calls are taking longer than normal due to hospitals declaring "diversion" which closes off emergency rooms to new patients arriving via ambulance. Thanks to mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties, backup EMS assistance has been requested and provided.

## **ALEXANDER COUNTY SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK PROCLAMATION**

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve a proclamation declaring January 24-30, 2021 as School Choice Week in Alexander County. Commissioner Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM PROCLAMATION**

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve a proclamation declaring December 1-31, 2020 as Christmas in Bethlehem. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **BROADBAND EXPANSION PROGRAM REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Rick French, County Manager, advised that Alexander County planned to provide a \$200,000 grant to extend broadband service to residential and business customers in un/underserved areas. The first step in the process is to advertise for RFP's from qualified Internet Service Providers who will be required to provide a match of \$200,000 or greater.

Commissioner Peal made a motion to move forward with the RFP's as requested. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **ADOPTION OF 2021 COMMISSIONERS' MEETING SCHEDULE**

Rick French, County Manager, presented the 2021 Commissioners' Meeting Schedule as follows:

January 4, 2021 / CHSB Meeting  
February 1, 2021  
March 1, 2021 / CHSB Meeting  
April 12, 2021  
April 26, 2021  
May 10, 2021 / CHSB Meeting  
May 24, 2021  
June 7, 2021

June 21, 2021  
July 19, 2021 / CHSB Meeting  
August 2, 2021  
September 13, 2021 / CHSB Meeting  
October 4, 2021  
November 1, 2021 / CHSB Meeting  
December 6, 2021

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve the 2021 Commissioners' Meeting Schedule as presented. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **ADOPTION OF 2021 HOLIDAY SCHEDULE**

Rick French, County Manager, presented the 2021 Holiday Schedule as follows:

New Year's Day . . . . .Friday, January 1, 2021  
Martin Luther King Jr. Day . . . . .Monday, January 18, 2021  
Good Friday . . . . .Friday, April 2, 2021  
Memorial Day . . . . .Monday, May 31, 2021  
Independence Day . . . . .Monday, July 5, 2021  
Labor Day . . . . .Monday, September 6, 2021  
Veterans Day . . . . .Thursday, November 11, 2021  
Thanksgiving . . . . .Thursday & Friday, November 25 & 26, 2021  
Christmas . . . . .Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, December 22, 23, & 24, 2021

He pointed out that County offices would also be closed on December 31, 2021 in observance of the New Year's Day 2022.

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve the 2021 Holiday Schedule as presented. Chairman Mayberry seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS**

Rick French, County Manager, requested that Vice-Chairman Yoder be appointed to the Western Piedmont Sister Cities Association for a two-year term.

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the appointment. Commissioner Peal seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #25 - #31**

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #25 - #31 as follows:

Budget Amendment #25 – To budget for the 2020 CARES Act Supplemental grant funds for Election Day COVID costs.

Budget Amendment #26 – To increase the Sheriff’s Office budget for the use of Federal Equitable Share Funds to purchase a K-9 transport cage for the current K-9 unit and for training, supplies, and maintenance costs associated with the two new K-9’s, their dogs lots, and transport cages.

Budget Amendment #27 – To adjust the DSS budget for 1) the WPCOG FY 2021 revenue allocation and local match requirement for the Aging Nutrition Program, 2) CARES Act funding for additional meals, 3) a reduction in revenue from the In-Home WPCOG line item to increase revenue for the Aging Nutrition Program, and 4) a decrease in group insurance expenses to cover additional expenses for the Aging Nutrition Program.

Budget Amendment #28 – To adjust the multi-year Coronavirus Relief Fund grant for estimated interest earnings and expense reimbursement estimates to be claimed based on revisions to CRF guidance.

Budget Amendment #29 – To adjust the Park Improvements Project Fund for the addition of the Courthouse Park to the project budget ordinance (site preparation, landscaping, sidewalks, lighting and stage construction) and the allocation of updated cost estimates for Wittenburg Access (trail construction, parking lot expansion, and utilities).

Budget Amendment #30 – To budget for the FY 2021 General Fund transfer to the Park Improvements Project Fund for the estimated costs of the Courthouse Park and Wittenburg Access Projects.

Budget Amendment #31 – To increase the DSS budget for CARES Act funding to assist with Child and Adult Protective Services expenses due to teleworking from home (equipment, overtime, PPE, and supplies) as well as a \$100 supplement to foster care families for each foster care child for the months of July, August, and September.

Mr. French advised that the payout of overtime (other than at separation of employment) violated County policies and therefore recommended that the Board consider Budget Amendment #31 without that particular wording.

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #25 - #31 without the payout of overtime originally suggested in Budget Amendment #31. Chairman Mayberry seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

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



- A. Two projects were submitted to the Golden LEAF Foundation for consideration to submit a full grant application including:
- Bethlehem Water Tank – submitted by Alexander County to tie into the current water system.
  - Industrial Systems Program – submitted by CVCC to expand the program at the Applied Technologies Center
- B. Due to damage caused by Tropical Storm Zeta, Building Inspections has requested that electrical reconnection permit fees be waived (approx. 25 homes at \$75 each).

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to approve the waiver of electrical reconnection permit fees associated with Tropical Storm Zeta. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$1,705.55) and Tax Refunds (\$1,671.56) for October 1-23, 2020.  
B. Minutes from the October 12, 2020 Regular Commissioners' Meetings.

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

## **CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES**

At 7:38 PM, the Board transitioned into the Consolidated Human Services Board Meeting and proceeded as follows:

- Public Comment – there was no one signed up to speak.
- DSS Adult Services / Nutrition Program Update – LeeAnne Whisnant, Consolidated Human Services Director, informed the Board that at the end of FY 2019-2020, the CARES Act significantly increased funding for this program through the WPCOG which also led to an increase in interest/need. Due to improper internal management of the checks and balances, funding dwindled quickly and staff was forced to implement a decrease in the volume of meals provided to ensure the remaining budget would last through June 2021. Staff is currently contacting clients to determine level of need, working with local food banks and other community resources to provide alternate assistance, and transferring any funds available within the DSS budget for this program (Budget Amendment # 27).

Commissioner Peal asked if DSS could partner with the School System to provide meals. Ms. Whisnant replied that this was a Federal program with hard rules which limited many possible avenues and partnerships, but that staff would investigate every opportunity.

**CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5 & 6) CONTRACTUAL & PERSONNEL**

Chairman Mayberry made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:52 PM to discuss contractual matters and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5 & 6). Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Chairman Mayberry made a motion to adjourn at 8:23 PM. Commissioner Reese 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