

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING August 1, 2022

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: Ronnie Reese, Chairman
 Marty Pennell, Vice-Chairman
 Kent Herman
 Josh Lail
 Larry Yoder

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

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, August 1, 2022 in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Chairman Reese requested consideration of new Health Department codes/fees for COVID-19 infant vaccines and children's boosters as Agenda Item #9.

Commissioner Lail made a motion to adopt the agenda as amended. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one spoke during the Public Comment Period.

2023 REVALUATION PROCESS / SCHEDULING OF PUBLIC HEARING

Doug Fox, Tax Administrator, reported that N.C.G.S. 105-286 required reappraisal of all real property at least every 8 years, noting that Alexander County's last revaluation was in 2015. This is the Tax Office's first in-house parcel review, saving approx. \$750,000 for outsourcing. Mr. Fox stated that staff had been visiting parcels over the past two years to verify property data. Of Alexander County's estimated 25,000 parcels, about 12,000 are "improved."

Jimmy Tanner with Tanner Valuation Group, who completed the Schedule of Values and reviewed commercial properties, explained that the goal of a reappraisal was to adjust property values to the current market value. He gave a slide show presentation that included information related to the revaluation process, tax value vs. market value, appeals, etc. and noted that as of July 2022, tax values based on the 2015 revaluation are around 58% of existing market value (goal is 100%).

Mr. Fox advised that valuation notices should be mailed to all property owners in February or March 2023 with the new assessed value as of January 1, 2023. A copy of the Schedule of Values, standards, and rules is available at the Tax Office and Administration Office.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to schedule the required public hearing to review the Schedule of Values on Monday, September 19, 2022 at 6:00 PM at the CVCC / Alexander Center in Room 103. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

2022-2023 ENERGY PROGRAMS OUTREACH PLAN

Thomas Mitchell, DSS Director, presented the 2022-2023 Energy Programs Outreach Plan for Alexander County DSS, an annual requirement by the federal government, for approval. This plan addresses outreach and application activities related to energy programs such as the Crisis Intervention, Low Income Energy Assistance, and Weatherization Programs.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the 2022-2023 Energy Programs Outreach Plan. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

REGISTER OF DEEDS JOB RECLASSIFICATION REQUEST

Before his presentation, Scott Hines, Register of Deeds, congratulated the Alexander Post 170 Junior Legion Ladies who placed third in the State American Legion Lady Fastpitch Championship.

Mr. Hines discussed 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 FY 2022 totaled \$617,057.50).

- County positions that have been reclassified in the past few years.
- Comparison of Register of Deeds salaries vs. other County positions (salaries for Register of Deeds employees, not including Mr. Hines, ranks 26th out of 30 departments).
- Requested classification changes – Assistant Register of Deeds from Grade 63 to 66 and Deputy Register of Deeds from Grade 62 to 64.

He advised that this was a subsequent request from November 2020 when he gave the same presentation to the Board. At that time, Mr. Hines was asked to include the reclassification proposal in the FY 2022 budget request, which was denied in lieu of salary increases. The reclassification proposal was again included in the FY 2023 Register of Deeds budget request; however, Mr. Hines stated that he was only offered one opportunity to meet with the Board for discussion. Having received notice of the scheduled meeting only one week prior, he was unable to attend. He felt this lack of inclusion forced him to operate outside of the budget process, which was unacceptable.

Mr. Hines pointed out that the Alexander County Library received \$80,000 more in funding than the Register of Deeds Office but generated much less revenue. In addition, the Children's Librarian is classed one grade higher than the Assistant Register of Deeds. He felt his staff's responsibilities more important than those of many higher classed positions and mistakes were more legally consequential than mis-shelving a book. In conclusion, he clarified that this was not a request for salary increases, only grade classification upgrades, and suggested positions be placed in lower steps within the new grades to prevent any budget increases.

When asked by Vice-Chairman Pennell to explain the steady increase in Register of Deeds salaries since 2019 shown on one of the charts in his presentation, Mr. Hines replied that when he took office, the Register of Deeds' salary was the 6th lowest in the state so he pushed for pay increases, which he received. However, he reported that these increases had not kept up with CPI.

Chairman Reese felt all County employees were important and that the Board was making efforts to increase pay (5% COLA this month and a pay study) but noted that being a small county with less tax base than our larger neighbors, these efforts took time to implement.

MEETING SCHEDULE CHANGE

Rick French, County Manager, asked the Board to reschedule the September 12th Commissioners' Meeting to September 19, 2022.

Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the meeting schedule change for the September meeting. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #4 - #6 & PROJECT BUDGET ORDINANCES #P-2 & #P-3

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #4 - #6 as well as Project Budget Ordinances #P-2 and #P-3 as follows:

Budget Amendment #4 – To 1) budget for the remaining balance of the March 2021 contract to expand broadband service due to work that began in FY 2021 that will be completed in 2023 and 2) increase the Detention Center budget for the portion of the COVID-19 Mitigation grant that will be spent in FY 2024.

Budget Amendment #5 – To increase the DSS budget for the new State funding authorization for the FY 2023 Low Income Household Water Assistance Program to provide citizens with emergency water assistance.

Budget Amendment #6 – To increase the Fire / Emergency Services budget for additional \$5,000 per month payments to Ellendale and Hiddenite Fire Departments for responding to countywide calls.

Project Budget Ordinance #P-2 – To budget for \$452,330 in ARC and NCDEQ grant funding for the Industrial Park Sewer Project.

Project Budget Ordinance #P-3 – To budget for \$650,000 in NC Commerce Rural Transformation Grant funds and \$100,000 in County funding for the Housing our Teachers Downtown Revitalization Project.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #4 - #6 and Project Budget Ordinances #P-2 and #P-3. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

Rick French, County Manager, requested that Gerald Davis be reappointed to the ABC Board for a 3-year term.

Commissioner Lail made a motion to approve the reappointment. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

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

- A. Due to a \$1.3 million cost estimate for needed repairs/renovations at Bethlehem Park, Mr. French asked for guidance on applying for a PARTF grant next spring, which could provide up to \$500,000 in matching grant funds toward the project. After discussion, the Board asked Mr. French to determine if the project could be broken into phases, with the most pressing needs addressed first versus waiting until next spring to get started.

- B. Foundation Forward, Inc. would like to hold a dedication ceremony for the Charters of Freedom monuments at Courthouse Park. Mr. French asked the Board to check their schedules for available dates.
- C. The Gwaltneys community building needs a new roof and other repairs. Because the building is used as an Election Day voting site, Mr. French suggested the County provide a \$1,000 grant to assist with repairs. Commissioner Lail pointed out the many privately owned community buildings throughout the county and expressed concerns with being consistent with financial contributions; however, Chairman Reese felt the grant would be appropriate since the County used the building on an annual basis. Mr. French plans to arrange for the commissioners to visit the community building.
- D. The next Fire Chief's Meeting is scheduled for August 23, 2022 at 7:00 PM at Alexander County Emergency Services.
- E. Chairman Reese announced that Stony Point Volunteer Fire Department had been notified of their new ISO rating, a Class 4.

NEW COVID-19 CODES/FEES

Chairman Reese presented new codes/fees needed by the Health Department to bill for infant COVID-19 vaccines as well as boosters for children ages 6 months to 5 years.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the new COVID-19 codes/fees as requested. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$135.88) and Tax Refunds (\$715.87) for July 11-24, 2022.
- B. Minutes from the July 18, 2022 Regular Meeting.
- C. Agreement with the WPCOG for grant management assistance on the ARC Industrial Park Sewer Project Grant Management Assistance for August 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

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

Chairman Reese made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:29 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Vice-Chairman Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chairman Reese made a motion to adjourn at 8:21 PM. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Ronnie L. Reese, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board