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**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING**      October 3, 2022

**ALEXANDER COUNTY**  
**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

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

**ABSENT:**     Josh Lail

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

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, October 3, 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 Young Marine Sergeant Vince Sothoron led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

**COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Commissioner Yoder stated that the Historic Preservation Committee traveled to Wilkesboro last week to tour several restored properties.

Chairman Reese discussed attending the grand opening / ribbon cutting ceremony for Sweet Vintage Chic Boutique last Friday.

Vice-Chairman Pennell expressed his condolences to the family of Rev. Steve Parks who passed away on September 27, 2022.

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Chairman Reese requested the addition of a resolution appointing a Review Officer as part of Agenda Item #8 (Board Appointments & Reappointments).

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

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Randy Bentley discussed his frustrations with Open Broadband, noting that he had been waiting for service for almost two years. After signing up in December 2020, he received a call from Nick Steward in the spring of 2021, who indicated that Mr. Bentley would be connected within a month. In May 2021, an installer came to Mr. Bentley's home and suggested he cut several trees to have better line-of-sight to the Moore Mountain tower. Since that time (and after cutting 8 trees), Mr. Bentley has repeatedly contacted Open Broadband for updates and has received many promises and excuses as to why he still does not have service. He felt Open Broadband was not honoring their contract with Alexander County.

## **RED RIBBON WEEK PROCLAMATION**

Young Marine Sergeant Vince Sothoron with the Mecklenburg Young Marines, a youth organization that promotes a healthy, drug-free lifestyle as well as teamwork, leadership, and discipline, was present to promote Red Ribbon Week. He explained that President Ronald Reagan initiated Red Ribbon Week in 1988 after Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena was murdered in Mexico by drug traffickers in 1985. Red Ribbon Week is celebrated nationally each year during the last week of October to not only honor Agent Camarena, but to also bring awareness to the dangers of the sale and use of illegal drugs.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the proclamation declaring October 23-31, 2022 as Red Ribbon Week in Alexander County. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **VAYA HEALTH PRESENTATION**

Zack Shepherd, Vaya Health Community Relations Regional Director, gave a slide show presentation that included the following information:

- Current challenges – since the end of the pandemic, increased demand for services, expansion of new health plans, and loss of professionals to remote positions has created waitlists for services. In response, Vaya is working with providers to address these challenges while attempting to expand and develop new service opportunities across the region. Rates for all service areas have been increased to help retain/recruit staff and improve access to care in rural communities.

- Statewide Child & Youth Improvement Initiative – Vaya is working with all LME/MCOs to establish a seamless transition of care for children placed outside the Vaya region and an Embedded Care Manager will soon be placed at Alexander County DSS. Vaya hopes to add 20 crisis beds (to the current 38) to reduce/eliminate the need for DSS agencies to temporarily house children with an emergency need. Rates for therapeutic foster care have been increased to create an extensive TFC network to expand the number of TFC homes, improve coordination of services, and allow children to remain in their home communities and with TFC parents.

Mr. Shepherd also reviewed county data highlights such as number of members served, location services were received, etc.

### **WIRELESS BROADBAND EXPANSION PROJECT UPDATE**

Dave McCracken, Open Broadband Western Regional Manager, reported that all Phase 1 milestones were complete with the exception of the Moore Mountain tower, which has now been deemed unsafe for the equipment load. Because of unsuccessful attempts to negotiate another agreement with the Moore Mountain property owner that would allow Open Broadband to build another tower, Mr. McCracken is investigating a site on Pores Knob in Wilkes County that could reach the Mt. Olive Church Road area as well as a portion of Vashti. His crew plans to install new equipment on the Ellendale tower off Willie McLeod Road to provide non line-of-site service to many residents, extending into the Lambert Fork and Dover Church Road areas. Equipment has also been updated on Round Top and Linney’s Mountain towers.

For Phase 2, plans are to have equipment mounted on the Thomas Lane tower in Stony Point in a couple of weeks. He added that several hubs had also been established in the northeastern section of the county. To date, Open Broadband has connected 300 customers and hopes to add another 50-75 in the next couple of months.

Vice-Chairman Pennell expressed concerns with delays and problems surrounding the Moore Mountain and Thomas Lane towers as well as unfulfilled promises made by Open Broadband staff, pointing out that he had received many calls from citizens.

Mr. McCracken discussed several contributing factors such as shipping delays and a recent switch to a higher quality equipment, also pointing out that he just became project manager in April 2022.

### **ADOPTION OF THE 2023 SCHEDULE OF VALUES**

Doug Fox, Tax Administrator, requested approval of the 2023 Schedule of Values, pointing out that the schedule was originally presented at the August 1<sup>st</sup> Commissioners’ Meeting and the public hearing held on September 19, 2022 as outlined by NC General Statutes. He noted that new values would be mailed to property owners in January 2023.

Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the 2023 Schedule of Values as presented. Vice-Chairman Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **NC Foothills Experience Project**

Alison Adams, WPCOG Director of Community & Regional Planning, provided a live overview of the new NC Foothills Experience web app, a first-of-its-kind application designed to highlight the extensive collection of adventures, experiences, amenities, and food destinations across the Unifour region. The project, which was made possible by EDA CARES Act funding, took two years to complete and focuses on the following 4 key categories:

- Outdoor adventures – state and local trails, greenways, parks, ball fields, and biking opportunities.
- Fun places – cultural amenities such as museums, libraries, art galleries, and historic destinations.
- Farm fresh – local food in the form of u-pick farms, roadside stands, butchers, and farmers markets.
- Cool spaces – wineries, distilleries, bike shops, outfitters, and local breweries.

Ms. Adams pointed out that the NC Foothills Experience web app could also be used by employers as a tool to attract and retain employees, by realtors to promote the area to potential buyers, and school systems to educate students.

## **Budget Ordinance Amendments #14 & #15**

Rick French, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #14 & #15 as follows:

Budget Amendment #14 – To increase the Health Department budget for ARPA grant funds passed through the Cabarrus Health Alliance to Alexander County for the COVID-19 Public Health Workforce grant.

Budget Amendment #15 – To increase the Fire / Emergency Services budget for 1) estimated additional \$15,000 for the purchase of a new Chevy Tahoe to replace a 1999 Ford F-250 and 2) estimated \$20,000 for the purchase and installation of related equipment, accessories, and reflective striping.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #14 & #15. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **Board Appointments & Reappointments**

Rick French, County Manager, requested the following appointments and reappointments.

Sister Cities Association Committee – reappoint Lorie Street and Commissioner Yoder.

Unifour Home Consortium – reappoint Rick French.

Review Officer and Watershed / Floodplain / Subdivision Administrator – appoint Brian Burgess.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the appointments and reappointments along with the resolution appointing Brian Burgess as a Review Officer for Alexander County. Vice-Chairman Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

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

- A. Two meetings in January and February 2023 may be necessary to interview potential architects for the new courthouse. Mr. French asked the Board to check their schedules.
- B. Doug Chapman with McGill Associates provided staff with an approximate schedule for the Bowman Court Sewer Project as follows:
  - Complete designs and submit for plan review / permitting – October 2022
  - Receive authorization to bid – November 2022
  - Advertise for bids – November 2022
  - Receive bids – December 2022
  - Award bid – January 2023
  - Execute contracts and hold preconstruction conference – March 2023
  - Construction completion – December 2023

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$2,771.78) and Tax Refunds (\$1,682.78) for September 9-25, 2022.
- B. Minutes from the September 19, 2022 Regular Meeting.
- C. Unseal January 11, 2016 – December 3, 2019 Closed Session Minutes.

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

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

Chairman Reese made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:15 PM to discuss contractual matters and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(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 8:00 PM. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

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Ronnie L. Reese, Chairman

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Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board