

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING December 5, 2022

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

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

STAFF: Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, December 5, 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.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

No reports were given.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

SWEARING IN CEREMONY FOR ALEXANDER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Honorable Dale Graham, Chief District Court Judge, administered oaths of office to Board of Education members Robert Arguelles, Josh Dagenhart, Anthony McLain, and Matthew Reese.

SWEARING IN CEREMONY FOR ALEXANDER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Honorable Dale Graham, Chief District Court Judge, administered oaths of office to County Commissioners Marty Pennell, Ronnie Reese, Larry Yoder, and Kent Herman.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one spoke during the Public Comment Period.

PUBLIC HEARING: REZONING CASE 22-01 – BETHLEHEM BAPTIST CHURCH

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, presented Rezoning Case 22-01 submitted by Stephen Tyler Brown on behalf of Bethlehem Baptist Church who requested rezoning of property located on the north corner of NC Highway 127 and Richey Road from RA-20 (Residential-Agriculture) to H-C (Highway Commercial) in order to market the property for sale as commercial. The size of the property is 4.16 acres and is currently vacant.

After reviewing aerials of the property and criteria to be considered when conducting rezoning cases, Mr. Burgess reported that, although there were no specific commercial plans for the parcel, the requested rezoning aligned with the Alexander County Comprehensive Plan, which mentions this area being located in a commercial corridor. Therefore, both staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission have recommended approval of the rezoning request. In response to a question by Commissioner Yoder, Mr. Burgess stated that no opposition had been received.

Commissioner Lail questioned whether he should abstain from taking action on this matter since he is a member of Bethlehem Baptist Church. The Board did not feel recusal was necessary because Commissioner Lail would not personally or financially benefit from the property being rezoned.

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

Vice-Chairman Pennell made a motion to approve Rezoning Case 22-01 based on recommendations from staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission that the rezoning request is consistent with the Alexander County Comprehensive Plan and compatible with adjacent uses. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: TEXT AMENDMENT 22-03 – FRIENDSHIP LUTHERAN CHURCH / ELECTRONIC SIGNS

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, presented Text Amendment 22-03 to Section 154.111(H) of the Alexander County Zoning Ordinance that would allow community oriented organizations to install signage that is common to their regular operation while maintaining reasonable standards on how those signs can be implemented.

He explained that Friendship Lutheran Church had requested the ability to replace their current message board signage with an electronic message board; however, electronic message boards are currently not allowed in RA-20 districts. One solution would be to rezone the property to something other than RA-20, but doing so would result in a rezoning request each time a church, fire department, community center, etc. applied for these types of signs. Because electronic signs are common and tied to the general operations of both government and non-profit charitable organizations (including churches), staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission recommended the following text amendment to Section 154.111(H) of the Zoning Ordinance:

As written – *Insignia of non-profit charitable or government organizations.*

Suggested – *Signs relevant to the operation of non-profit charitable or government operations that meet all other applicable standards.*

Mr. Burgess noted that including the language “meet all other applicable standards” would guarantee that, while these signs may be exempted from zoning district specific restrictions, they must still comply with regulations and restrictions related to brightness, transition speed, and animation to protect the well-being of motorists.

After a motion by Commissioner Lail, second by Commissioner Herman, and unanimous vote, the public hearing was called to order and comments requested. There being none, Chairman Reese made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Text Amendment 22-03 to Section 154.111(H) of the Alexander County Zoning Ordinance due to its consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: TEXT AMENDMENT 22-04 – VARIOUS AMENDMENTS & PLANNED DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, presented Text Amendment 22-04 to various sections of the Alexander County Zoning Ordinance, noting that staff had begun a review of the County’s land development ordinances to identify minor amendments with plans for a full rewrite in the future. The proposed text amendments included the following sections:

- 154.071 – allows one carport per parcel in the front yard of the property as long as it is attached to the driveway of the home.
- 154.079 – addresses a typo in the R-20 residential area, yard, and height requirement table and changes the 12,000 square foot minimum lot size to 20,000 square feet.

- 154.095 – adds language to specify the dimensional requirements of travel ways as well as parking spaces.
- 154.127 – gives County staff authority to remove nonconforming signs in right-of-way areas.
- 155.155 – creates a conditional use zoning district to address planned development districts.
- 154.223 & 154.224 – consolidates these two sections to eliminate repetitiveness and make requirements and expectations clear.

Commissioner Lail expressed concerns with changing the minimum lot size for R-20 residential to 20,000 square feet. When considering the popularity of higher density developments as well as current subdivisions in the county that would not meet this requirement (such as Wittenburg Springs), he felt the minimum lot size should remain at 12,000 square feet.

After a motion by Commissioner Lail, second by Commissioner Herman, and unanimous vote, the public hearing was called to order and comments requested.

Public Comment

Myra Hertzler inquired about the Board's vision for the Bethlehem area, pointing out that Highway 127 was scheduled to be widened and tonight's approval to rezone another property to commercial. She asked if this trend would continue farther down Highway 127 affecting homes, families, and traffic.

Chairman Reese replied that the Board had no control over NCDOT's plans to widen or repair any roadway in the county and felt a 4-lane highway would make the area more attractive for businesses; however, he was not in favor of forcing citizens from their homes.

Commissioner Lail felt the bulk of commercial development would be located closer to the bridge crossing Lake Hickory. He also pointed out that NCDOT's latest plans showed the 4-lane ending at Richey Road.

Vice-Chairman Pennell suggested Ms. Hertzler review the Alexander County Comprehensive Plan as well as the Bethlehem Community Plan, both of which projects the commercial corridor ending at Bethlehem Baptist Church.

Commissioner Yoder advised that he would request an update on the Highway 127 Widening Project at the next Transportation Advisory Committee.

There being no further comment, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to close the public hearing. Vice-Chairman Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Chairman Reese made a motion to approve Text Amendment 22-04 to the Alexander County Zoning Ordinance as requested due to its consistency with the Alexander County Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: APPROVAL OF ROAD NAMES

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, submitted the following road name for approval, noting that it met all required regulations and was checked for duplication and sound indexing:

<u>Road No.</u>	<u>Road Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
3727JH	Middle River Lane	Off Teague Town Road

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

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the road name as presented. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

GUARDIAN AD LITEM UPDATE

Tennille Hileman, Guardian ad Litem Administrator for Judicial Branch 22A, gave an update on the GAL Program and discussed the need for more Alexander County volunteers to represent local children in court. She explained that the GAL Program trains and prepares community volunteers to represent abused and neglected children by advocating for their best interests in court. There are currently 18 volunteers assigned to Alexander County; however, 7 of them are from Iredell. In addition, Alexander County has 9 unassigned cases. She stressed the importance of the GAL Program, noting that cases remained with the same volunteer throughout the entire legal process, which was helpful to the children involved.

For more information, citizens can visit www.volunteerforgal.org or contact Ms. Hileman at (704) 832-6816 or tennille.hileman@nccourts.org.

2021-2022 AUDIT REPORT

Erica Brown with Martin Starnes & Associates gave a slide show presentation for the 2021-2022 Audit Summary, which included the following information:

- Review of past and future GASB statements.
- General Fund revenues – ad valorem taxes (property and motor vehicle – 1.04% increase), local option sales taxes (9% increase), restricted intergovernmental (federal and state grants – less than 0.1% decrease), sales and services (Health Department, Detention, EMS, License Plate Agency), permits and fees (Inspections and Register of Deeds), and other (donations, private grants, ABC tax, video programming tax).
- General Fund expenditures – general government (8% increase), public safety (16.4% increase), environmental protection, economic and physical development, human

services (5.5% increase), culture and recreation, education (0.6% increase), and debt service.

- General Fund debt – \$2,689,000 as of June 30, 2022 and will be paid off in 2026.
- Fund Balance overview – 43.14% (\$24,098,600 total / \$19,195,572 available).
- Solid Waste Fund overview – budgetary net income of \$154,927.
- Water Funds overview – budgetary net income of \$708,357 for Bethlehem Water Fund and \$344,471 for County Water & Sewer Fund.
- Performance indicators – no general performance indicators were found but two material weaknesses for the Low Income Energy Assistance and Foster Care Programs were reported.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to accept the 2021-2022 Audit Summary as presented. Vice-Chairman Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

STREAM DEBRIS REMOVAL PROJECTS UPDATE

Pamela Bowman, SWCD Education Coordinator/Administration Specialist, gave updates on the following stream debris removal programs:

- Emergency Watershed Protection Program – debris has been removed from 3 streams (Houser Farms off Sulphur Springs Road, Lackey Farm off Alspaugh Dam Road, and Jimmy Lambert property off Huckleberry Ridge Road) and debris completely burned from two of the 3 sites. Ms. Bowman provided before and after photos of each site, noting that the project should be completed by early 2023.
- State Emergency Disaster Funds – bids are currently being accepted to restore one or two stream sites (depending on costs). McGill Associates is handling the administration of this program and staff plans to request approval of the selected contractor at the January 9, 2023 Commissioners' Meeting.
- Streamflow Rehabilitation Assistance Program – the bid package is being reviewed and should be posted later this month or in January. McGill Associates is also handling administration of the program that should fund restoration of 3 more streams.

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROPOSAL

Sheriff Chad Pennell outlined his plans to place a School Resource Officer at each of the 6 elementary schools not located within the Town of Taylorsville's jurisdiction that would include reclassifying 3 current officers and only hiring 3 new officers. When combined with utilizing funds from other departmental line items and in-house equipment, Sheriff Pennell estimates the County's first year cost for benefits and equipment to total \$104,875 in new funding (worst-case scenario) for benefits and equipment vs. \$636,000 quoted by the prior administration. Second year employee benefit costs are estimated at \$159,072.

Chairman Reese advised that later tonight, the Board would schedule a second meeting for the purpose of approving a budget amendment for the SRO proposal.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the election of Marty Pennell as Chairman for 2023. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed 4/1 (abstention by Vice-Chairman Pennell).

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Commissioner Herman made a motion approve the election of Josh Lail as Vice-Chairman for 2023. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed 4/1 (abstention by Commissioner Lail).

CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM PROCLAMATION

Commissioner Lail made a motion to approve a proclamation declaring December 1-31, 2022 as Christmas in Bethlehem. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

SCHEDULING OF SECOND MEETING IN DECEMBER

After discussion of dates, Commissioner Lail made a motion to schedule a second Commissioners' Meeting on December 12, 2022 at 6:00 PM in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center. Vice-Chairman Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #24 - #28

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #24 - #28 as follows:

Budget Amendment #24 – To increase the County Parks Department for 1) trail work (drainage dips) at Rocky Face Park and 2) the annual Independence Day fireworks display.

Budget Amendment #25 – To reimburse the Emergency Telephone System Fund for FY 2022 expenditures that were reclassified to the General Fund as required by the NC 911 Board.

Budget Amendment #26 – To budget for the closeout of the sewer portion of the Industrial Timber Grant Project and transfer the remaining cash balance back to the General Fund.

Budget Amendment #27 – To transfer the remaining cash balance for the Industrial Timber Sewer Project to the General Fund because the sewer portion is complete.

Budget Amendment #28 – To budget for a true-up adjustment for FY 2022 tax revenues compared to FY 2022 disbursements for fire districts

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #24 - #28. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, requested the following appointments and reappointments:

Local Emergency Planning Committee – appoint Thomas Mitchell, DSS Director; Jeff Sigmon, EMS Director; and Billie Walker, Health Director, and reappoint Andrew Ferguson with Alexander County CERT, all for 3 years.

WPCOG Technical Coordinating Committee – appoint Brian Burgess

Planning & Zoning Commission – appoint Byron Frye to fulfill an unexpired term that expires in June 2025.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the appointments and reappointments. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items discussed during Other Business.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Release Requests (\$1,997.50) for November 1-30, 2022 and Tax Refunds (\$34,617.82) for November 1-27, 2022.
- B. Minutes from the November 7, 2022 Regular Meeting.
- C. Request from Major Mark St.Clair to surplus former Sheriff Chris Bowman's badge, duty weapon (Glock 45 9mm, Serial #BLA5653) and holster as well as his backup weapon (Glock 43x 9mm, Serial #BYBA963).
- D. Agreement with Maurer Architecture for the NC Rural Transformation Grant – Housing Our Teachers Project architectural and engineering services.

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

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 7:49 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.
- Public Health Report – Billie Walker, Health Director, reviewed the following:
 - Accreditation Update – the NC Local Health Department Accreditation Board met on November 18th and voted to approve a recommendation for Accreditation with Honors for the Alexander County Health Department. Staff has already begun gathering data in preparation of the next accreditation cycle in 2026.
 - Communicable Disease Report – there has been an uptick of COVID-19 cases in the region with 19 cases reported in Alexander County over the past 7 days and an outbreak at a local juvenile detention facility. There is currently one citizen hospitalized and an additional death was reported, bringing the total to 154. There are 12,210 cases of monkeypox statewide but none in Alexander County. Ms. Walker reported that influenza and RSV were also on the rise, especially in adults.
 - Community Health Assessment Survey – citizens ages 15 and over are encouraged to complete this survey that will be used to identify focus areas and guide the direction of the Health Department for the next 4 years.
 - What's New for 2023 – includes a new temperature-controlled storage unit purchased with COVID funds, finalizing and implementing the results of the Community Health Assessment, and increasing access for behavioral health and substance abuse counseling.
 - Fee Approval – staff recommends a flat \$25 fee for COVID-19 tests since they are no longer free through the State. This is lower than the Medicaid price but staff wants to make testing affordable for everyone, including those who are un/underinsured. Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the \$25 fee for COVID tests. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.
- Senior Center Report – Kristy Hunt, Senior Center Director, stated that participation continues to increase and she discussed several upcoming events such as a blood drive and a shred-a-thon. Staff plans to add more evidence-based classes in 2023 as well as some day trips (and possibly overnight trips). Other items mentioned included the Senior Center's 30th Anniversary Celebration in October, AARP tax assistance beginning in February 2023, and Medicare open enrollment that began on October 15th and ends this Thursday.

- DSS Report – Trena Riddle, DSS Income Maintenance Program Manager, and Michael Dodson, DSS Business Officer, stated that 11 new employees had been hired since October and the current vacancy rate is 7%. Only 6 vacancies remain and interviews have been scheduled for 3 of them. Employee engagement gatherings continue monthly and \$4,300 has been collected to assist with playground improvements. Other items discussed included:
 - Shelter Operations – staff met with Daniel Fox, Emergency Management Coordinator, to plan for a stakeholders meeting and 2023 quarterly training. The American Red Cross plans to provide equipment training in January and a meeting with the Red Cross Disaster Program Manager will be held later this month.
 - Foster Care / Adoptions – there are currently 17 children eligible for adoption and 4 adoptions have been completed this month, bringing the total adoptions for the year to 6. A group of 4 siblings that has been in placement for 5 years may finally be adopted in February 2023.

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 8:09 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 9:45 PM. Vice-Chairman Pennell seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Ronnie L. Reese, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board