

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING March 6, 2023

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

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

STAFF: Ben Faulkenberry, County Attorney
 Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, March 6, 2023 in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

*****SPECIAL RECOGNITION*****

On behalf of the entire Board, Commissioner Yoder presented a Key to the County to the family of Rick French in recognition of his dedication and loyalty to Alexander County. Commissioner Yoder stated that Mr. French's position as County Manager and his work with the NC Association of County Commissioners, Vaya Health, Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority, etc. required many hours away from home and he thanked Mr. French's family for their sacrifice.

Chairman Pennell presented the family with a framed proclamation honoring Mr. French's life and community service, which highlighted numerous projects and accomplishments during his 23-year tenure with Alexander County.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Vice-Chairman Lail discussed early progress made to begin updating the Alexander County Comprehensive Plan, noting that the advisory committee has held several meetings and was developing a public survey that will allow citizens to voice their opinions. He encouraged the public to take the survey, the results of which will help shape the future land development plans for the entire county.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Karissa Miller, resident of Richey Road, spoke about the recent revaluation of property and how it could negatively affect property owners, especially those on a fixed income. She compared Alexander County's current property tax rate to surrounding counties and suggested that a 4-year revaluation cycle (as opposed to 8 years) could help alleviate sticker shock and also educate the public on the reappraisal process. She asked the Board to consider the welfare of its citizens when determining the property tax rate for the upcoming budget year.

PUBLIC HEARING: REZONING CASE 23-01 – BETHLEHEM PARTNERS, LLC

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, presented Rezoning Case 23-01 submitted by Bethlehem Partners, LLC who requested rezoning of property located at 134 Satellite Road from RA-20 (Residential-Agriculture) to H-C (Highway Commercial) in order to allow the potential use of the property for commercial and institutional uses. The size of the property is 8.83 and is currently vacant.

After reviewing aerials of the property and criteria to be considered when conducting rezoning cases, Mr. Burgess reported that the commercial corridor located on the Future Land Use Map ends just west of this parcel; however, because these maps are not intended to be parcel specific, this tract is a reasonable candidate for commercial development. In addition, the Bethlehem Community Plan adopted in 2019 places this property in a commercial area.

Several citizens expressed concerns during the Planning & Zoning Commission's public hearing held on February 9, 2023 related to traffic, storm water, lighting, and public safety, which were addressed by the property owners. The PZC recommended approval of the rezoning.

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

Public Comment

Property owners Charlie Finkel and Gene Stoker both said they had no concrete plans as of yet and were open to suggestions from the community. Options considered so far have included large-scale self-storage for boats and RVs, a gated senior community (would require residential zoning), and discussions have been held with Bethlehem Fire & Rescue about a satellite station on a portion of the property.

Mr. Finkel pointed out that the end result would be a nice addition to the area, noting that he was a Bethlehem resident that would drive past this property daily. Mr. Stoker added that he and Mr. Finkel were interested in an urgent care for the Bethlehem community but at a different location than the subject property.

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

Commissioner Reese made a motion to approve Rezoning Case 23-01 based on its consistency with the Alexander County Comprehensive Plan, the Bethlehem Community Plan, and compatibility with adjacent uses. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

DOWNTOWN TAYLORSVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT PROGRESS REPORT

Clay Griffith with ACME Preservation Services and Josi Ward with Foreground Consulting provided an update on the Downtown Taylorsville Historic District that included the following information:

- ACME Preservation and Foreground Consulting were hired in November 2022 to conduct research and prepare the nomination for the Downtown Taylorsville Historic District to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The proposed historic district includes 6 blocks from the Alexander County Courthouse to the old hotel. Establishment of a historic district encourages owners to maintain buildings and preserve historic elements, with an opportunity for tax credits.
- A building inventory is underway that will include all properties located within the proposed historic district, physical appearance, dates of construction and renovation, etc. This phase should be completed by late March.
- Once the building inventory is finished, the historic context research will begin to determine the history of development, owners, and building uses. This phase should be completed by May.
- A draft nomination will be ready by the first of June for review by the NC Historic Preservation Office and Alexander County Historic Preservation Committee.

- After all comments have been received, the final nomination, along with maps, photos, etc. will be submitted to the NC Historic Preservation Office in October or November.

Mr. Griffith asked that any citizen willing to share historic information or photographs of property located within the proposed historic district to contact him or Ms. Ward.

ALEXANDER COUNTY 2023 DIGITAL ACCESS PLAN

Duncan Cavanaugh, WPCOG Senior Planner, reviewed the 2023 Digital Access Plan for Alexander County that was developed by the WPCOG after receiving a grant from NC State University to draft plans for each of the Unifour counties. He explained that the Digital Access Plan assessed the current state of digital inclusion, identified gaps in access, and provided recommendations to improve access to quality broadband throughout the entire county. Those recommendations were as follows:

- Work with state and federal legislators to encourage the FCC to develop more detailed broadband maps.
- Reduce costs of future internet service expansions by developing a “dig once” approach that will enable future broadband providers to more easily and cheaply install fiber by threading it through existing conduits.
- Position the county for grant funding opportunities by maintaining a strong working relationship with the NC Department of Information Technology and other organizations that offer broadband / hotspot / device grant funding.
- Work with the WPCOG to monitor grant opportunities and apply for grant funding as needed.
- Develop and regularly update a listing of community based organizations, churches, and private businesses that offer free, reliable, and publicly accessible Wi-Fi access. When completed, distribute a printed map with locations to residents and develop a GIS map that is accessible to the public.
- Encourage County GIS / IT planners to develop updated local broadband coverage maps as new data becomes available.
- Improve broadband adoption by actively promoting existing and new digital literacy courses and basic computer workshops offered through the community college, libraries, NCWorks centers, schools, local non-profits, and senior centers.
- Explore the potential for establishing public access computer centers in strategic areas of the county.
- Improve accessibility by actively promoting established and future programs (from internet service providers, the Emergency Broadband Benefits Program, Affordable Connectivity Program, etc.) that offer stipends, scholarships, or subsidies to residents.
- Work to expand access to wireless hotspots and computers for students and other residents.
- Continue to support the expansion of library-based computer courses as well as computer, device, and hotspot checkout programs.
- Expand public Wi-Fi access at County / municipal buildings, parks, and parking lots where feasible.

- Work with satellite and fixed wireless providers to expand service options for residents in the most rural portions of the county.
- Increase broadband availability by leveraging local faith-based organizations, non-profits, senior centers, and grassroots organizations to support broadband access and adoption.
- Expand access by promoting organizations that sell refurbished computers at a discount.
- Develop and regularly update a GIS map that shows where Wi-Fi hotspots are unable to access the internet.
- Expand availability to low income citizens by establishing public-private partnerships and sponsorships with local companies that will assist residents and students with the costs of internet subscriptions and devices.

Mr. Cavanaugh also discussed funding opportunities in the form of grants, loans, and partnerships.

VAYA HEALTH UPDATE

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

- In December 2022, Vaya launched Tailored Care Management that addresses the whole person (physical health, behavioral health, I/DD, TBI, pharmacy, long-term services, and any unmet health related resource needs).
- Starting in October 2023, Vaya will become a Prepaid Health Plan responsible for managing a Behavioral Health I/DD Tailored Plan, an integrated health plan designed for individuals with significant behavioral health and I/DD needs.
- As a Tailored Plan, Vaya will also serve other special populations such as Innovations, Traumatic Brain Injury waiver enrollees, and waitlist members. Vaya will also be responsible for managing the state's non-Medicaid behavioral health, I/DD, and TBI services for un/underinsured North Carolinians.
- Review of differences in benefit plans currently offered versus plans that will be available later this year.
- Review of goals and priorities such as tracking of staff/services at Comprehensive Care Centers, developing strategies to support providers, engaging community organizations, enhanced rates for various services and centers, expanded use of telemedicine, removing prior authorization approvals, continued work with school-based behavioral health services, etc.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTION OF OPIOID SETTLEMENTS & APPROVING SUPPLEMENTAL AGREEMENT WITH STATE OF NC FOR OPIOID LITIGATION PROCEEDS

Ben Faulkenberry, County Attorney, spoke about the effects of the opioid pandemic both nationally and at the local level, noting that from January 1, 2022 to March 3, 2023, Alexander County 911 Communications received 107 overdose related emergency calls. In an effort to help address this growing problem in communities, Alexander County joined thousands of local governments across the country in 2021 by entering into settlement agreements against opioid manufacturers, pharmaceutical distribution companies, and chain drug stores. Settlement payments from McKesson, Cardinal, Johnson & Johnson, and AmerisourceBergen began last year and will continue for at least 15 years.

Additional settlement agreements have been negotiated with 3 opioid distributors (Walmart, Walgreens, and CVS) and two manufacturers (Allergan and Teva), resulting in a second wave of settlement funds to NC counties and municipalities. Mr. Faulkenberry recommended approval of a resolution giving Chairman Pennell signatory authority on opioid settlement agreements and approving a Supplemental Agreement for Additional Funds with the State of NC. These funds are expected to begin during the second half of 2023.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the Opioid Settlement Resolution. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

REFERENDUM REQUEST FOR SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDACY FILING METHOD

Chairman Pennell stated that in 2021, a resolution to change the method of candidacy filing for the Alexander County Board of Education from non-partisan to partisan was brought before the Board, which was voted down by a 3/2 vote. The Board has received a request to reconsider that decision; however, Chairman Pennell explained that action tonight would only be to request the NC General Assembly to approve the holding of a referendum in Alexander County during the 2024 General Election to allow voters to choose their preferred method of candidacy filing for the Alexander County Board of Education. Any changes made as a result of the referendum would not take effect until the 2026 election cycle.

Commissioner Reese made a motion to request the NC General Assembly to approve the holding of a referendum during the 2024 General Election to allow voters to choose the method of candidacy filing for the Alexander County Board of Education. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #44 - #52

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #44 - #52 follows:

Budget Amendment #44 – To budget for the estimated abatement costs of two blighted properties (demolition and abatement of a house for \$10,000 and trash cleanup at another site for \$5,000).

Budget Amendment #45 – To increase the Health Department budget for additional federal grant funds from the 1) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for WIC and 2) Project Grants and Cooperative Agreements for Tuberculosis Control Programs.

Budget Amendment #46 – To increase the DSS budget for an additional Home and Community Care Block Grant funding allocation and an increase in the local match requirement for Housing / Home Improvement Projects.

Budget Amendment #47 – To 1) transfer \$25,000 from the Solid Waste Fund to the Landfill Closure Fund for a Corrective Action Evaluation Report and compliance boundary issues and 2) decrease the Landfill Closure Fund interest revenue based on year-to-date actual results.

Budget Amendment #48 – To budget for the closeout of the Soil & Water Emergency Watershed Protection Grant Project and allow \$4,750 in leftover funds to be used toward the Alternate State Emergency Stream Debris Removal Project.

Budget Amendment #49 – To increase the budget for the \$4,750 in leftover Soil & Water EWP grant funds to be used for the Alternate State Emergency Stream Debris Removal Project.

Budget Amendment #50 – To adjust the 911 Communications budget for pay increases as approved by the Board of Commissioners. The increase in the salaries expense also requires increases in the FICA and retirement expenses budgets. These increases will be offset by use of the 911 Communications contingency and group insurance funds that are available within the department, resulting in a net budget increase of \$0.

Budget Amendment #51 – To adjust the Sheriff's Office budget for pay increases as approved by the Board of Commissioners. The increase in the salaries expense also requires increases in the FICA and retirement expenses budgets. These increases will be offset by use of the Sheriff's Office contingency and group insurance funds that are available within the department, resulting in a net budget increase of \$0.

Budget Amendment #52 – To adjust the Detention Center budget for pay increases as approved by the Board of Commissioners. The increase in the salaries expense also requires increases in the FICA, retirement, and group insurance expenses budgets. These increases will be offset by use of the Detention Center contingency and other funds that are available within the department, resulting in a net budget increase of \$0.

Commissioner Herman made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #44 - #52. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

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

Juvenile Crime Prevention Council – appoint Christy Harrington for two years.

Library Board of Trustees – appoint David Murphy for 3 years.

Animal Control Advisory Board – appoint Billie Walker to fill the unexpired term of LeeAnne Whisnant that expires September 2023.

Planning & Zoning Commission – appoint Joey Price for 3 years.

Commissioner Reese made a motion to approve the appointments. Vice-Chairman Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items discussed during Other Business.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$3,822.46) for Tax Refunds (\$4,295.49) for January 30 – February 24, 2023.
- B. Resolution supporting the reclassification of Alexander County 911 Emergency Telecommunicators.
- C. Agreement with West Consultants, PLLC for engineering services for the ARC Industrial Park Shell Building Sanitary Sewer Extension Project.
- D. FY 2023 Audit Contract.
- E. February 2023 line item transfer report.

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

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 7:39 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, reiterated that the Alexander County Health Department received Reaccreditation with Honors in November 2022 and was

already preparing for the 2026 cycle. The Licensed Clinical Social Worker position has been offered, Health Educator and Medical Office Assistant positions have been posted, and the Environmental Health Specialist remains open. She stated that the Substance Abuse Coalition was discussing prevention strategies through use of opioid settlement funds, working with local/surrounding agencies, and implementing educational and community programs.

- Community Health Assessment – Mallory Chapman, Preparedness Coordinator, reviewed the results of the Community Health Assessment, which identifies factors affecting the health of the population and determines ways to address them. The process includes surveying the community, analyzing responses, selecting priorities, identifying resources, and finalizing focus areas. She provided the following information related to Alexander County's assessment:
 - Focus areas – affordability of care, access to care, depression/mental health, and overweight/obesity.
 - Top areas of improvement – drug/alcohol prevention, anxiety/stress management, childcare and parenting, exercise and fitness, managing weight, and elder care.
 - County goals – areas of improvement will be addressed by the Child Collaborative Focus Group / SUD Coalition, Healthy Alexandrians, Child Collaborative Focus Group, and Senior Center Focus Group.
- Integrated Preparedness Plan – Daniel Fox, Emergency Management Coordinator, discussed development of Alexander County's first Integrated Preparedness Plan, a document that contains preparedness priorities and activities, identifies equipment needs, and addresses potential training opportunities. Through surveys and various meetings, the following information has been determined:
 - Threats, hazards, and risks (ranked in order) – flooding, tornado, winter weather, pandemic, large fire, civil unrest, terrorism/active violence, cyber-attack, wildland fire, and HAZMAT.
 - Preparedness priorities – mass care services (sheltering), operational coordination, operational communications, and fire management and suppression.
 - Next steps – continue to develop a multi-year training calendar, develop the IPP, schedule training and exercises, and reassess annually and continual improvements.
- Renovations – in addition to a new temperature-controlled storage building and a covered entryway, Ms. Walker reviewed several current/upcoming renovations including:
 - Conference room – this update is to improve the Health Department meeting room by installing/upgrading the audio/visual system that will expand meeting potential for in-person and Zoom type meetings, not only for Health Department staff but also for community partners. New tables and chairs have been purchased that can create a more functional meeting space and can be broken down and easily stored. Utilization of this updated space will improve employee training and meeting capabilities.

- Lab area – the Health Department lab area is being expanded to improve the floor plan and layout into a more usable space for additional patient care and staff work areas. A new check-out window will ensure that clients make future appointments to improve continuity of care and also make payments prior to leaving the building.
 - Electronic sign – the current sign is small and hard for motorists to read. Upgrades to the sign will increase the screen dimensions and include color graphics to amplify and improve the visual health communication to the community.
 - Environmental Health scanning implementation – eFile-document software has been installed, staff has been trained, and scanning began last week. This will improve staff efficiency/productivity and allow for secure storage of physical on-site data, which will provide more work space for additional staff that will be needed to offer Environmental Health services.
- Annual Board Training – Ms. Walker presented the Board with their annual training notebook that contained core training documents and materials regarding authorities and responsibilities of the local Board of Health. This is a NC Local Public Health Accreditation requirement (Benchmark and Activities: 36.1, 36.2, and 36.3). The training notebook included the following:
 - Board Information
 - Board of Health Appointments and Terms
 - Powers and Duties of Local Board of Health
 - Accreditation of Local Health Departments
 - What is a BOH Rule?
 - Understanding the work of the Board of Health Part 1 & 2
 - Procedural Requirements for Rulemaking
 - Legal Responsibilities sand Authority
 - Public Health
 - ACHD Operational Procedures
 - Powers and Duties of local Health Director
 - Health Director Job Description
 - ACHD Organizational Chart
 - ACHD Budget Review
 - ACHD Manuals
 - ACHD Program Brochure
 - ACHD CHA/SOTCH/Strategic Plan
 - Resources
 - Association of NC Boards of Health
 - NC Public Health Association
 - American Public Health Association
 - NC Public Health Offices and Contacts
 - NC Institute for Public Health
 - Center for Disease Control and Prevention
 - NC State Center for Health Statistics

- NC General Statutes
- HIPAA and Public Health

After review of the Annual Review Guide, each Board member signed and dated the Acknowledgement Statement.

- Fee Approvals – after conducting an annual review of all Health Department and Environmental Health fees, several increases are recommended due to inflation. These include general clinic, lab, and immunization fees for the Health Department as well as Environmental Health permit fees, water samples, and plan review. Ms. Walker informed the Board that Alexander County’s fees would remain lower than what the State suggests.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the recommended fee increases for the Health Department and Environmental Health. Vice-Chairman Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

- What’s Coming –Medicaid Expansion (HB 76) that will provide \$135 million to increase access to healthcare for approx. 900,000 North Carolinians, a push for a bill raising the age for tobacco purchases to 21, Local Communicable Disease Programs (HB 108) to increase funding to local health departments to continue work already doing, and the official ending of the COVID-19 public health emergency on May 11, 2023 that will result in a substantial loss of public assistance funds for citizens.
- Senior Center Report – Kristy Hunt, Senior Center Director, stated that the center continues to offer a variety of activities for local seniors including exercise, needlework, woodcarving, line dancing, arts and crafts, games, gardening, music, and seminars. Bingo and birthday lunches continue every month and an evidence-based class called “A Matter of Balance” has been well attended. Several day trips are planned as well as two overnight trips (Nashville, TN in August and Amelia Island/St. Augustine/Jacksonville, FL in December). Ms. Hunt reported that the Senior Center had received a grant for identity and fraud prevention that will be used for a shred-a-thon event this week and AARP is again providing tax preparation services every Saturday until April 8, 2023. Medicare savings from January – December 2022 totaled \$593,468 for 922 seniors.
 - NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature – George Holleman, local delegate for the Tar Heel Legislature, said he would be traveling to Raleigh this month to present the 2023-2024 priorities and lobby for additional funding for senior centers, social services, and long-term care. The following priorities will be presented to the NC General Assembly:
 -
 - Allocate an additional \$8 million in recurring funds for Adult Protective Services to address staff shortages.
 - Increase the Senior Center General Purpose Appropriation by \$1,265,316 in recurring funds.

- Allocate an additional \$8 million in recurring funds for the Home and Community Care Block Grant.
- Allocate an additional \$1.5 million in recurring funds for 11 more long-term care ombudsmen.
- Strengthen long-term care staffing standards.

Mr. Holleman also mentioned the need for an alternate delegate for the NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature.

- DSS Report – Thomas Mitchell, DSS Director, began with condolences for the family of DSS employee Mary Barlowe who passed away unexpectedly early this morning. He stated that 6 new employees had been hired since October and the current vacancy rate is 7.5% (only 7 vacancies remain). Recent employee engagement events were Bingo Bash in January and Super Bowl Friday in February. New playground equipment has been installed and shelter training continues. Other items discussed included:
 - HB 76 (Medicaid Expansion) – passed the NC House on February 16th and, if approved, will add approx. 2,300 Medicaid cases in Alexander County. This will also impact DSS staff work load.
 - Public Health Emergency Termination – this will result in discontinued or decreased supplements and assistance for many citizens. Staff expects 800-1,000 Medicaid recipients that were auto-renewed during the pandemic to no longer be eligible. In addition, FNS food stamp allotments were reset in February from \$95/month back to \$16/month.
 - Foster Care / Adoptions – there are currently 16 children eligible for adoption and 46 children in foster care. The Adoption Committee is meeting monthly and 12 adoptions were completed in 2022. Staff has budgeted for 60 foster children in the upcoming FY 2023-2024 County budget.

Vice-Chairman Lail expressed concerns regarding rumors that children were not being removed from unsafe/dangerous homes due to associated costs, noting that money should never be made priority over a child's safety and well-being.

Mr. Mitchell agreed and said he was unaware of any Alexander County child being left in a dangerous environment due to budget. He also discussed the need for more foster homes, especially therapeutic homes for leveled placements.

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

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 8:53 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5 & 6). Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adjourn at 10:04 PM. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Marty A. Pennell, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board