

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING April 3, 2023

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

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

STAFF: Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, April 3, 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 Yoder gave the invocation and Commissioner Herman led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Chairman Pennell stated that the Courthouse Committee had been discussing plans for a new Alexander County Courthouse with input from law enforcement, staff, and those who use the current courthouse on a regular basis. He also mentioned progress with the drafting of a new Comprehensive Plan.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ryan Beckham, recreation soccer coach from the Hiddenite community, spoke about the need for soccer fields in Alexander County, noting that soccer was the most played sport in the world with over 400 players and 35 teams in Alexander County alone this season. Because the County Recreation Department has no regulation-size soccer fields, games are played in the outfields of baseball fields at several parks. He urged the Board to consider building soccer fields or a soccer complex.

PUBLIC HEARING: SPECIAL USE PERMIT 23-01 – HEATHER PAYNE

Chairman Pennell reviewed the order of proceedings for special use hearings and Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, gave an oath of sworn testimony to all individuals wishing to speak.

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, presented Special Use Permit 23-01 submitted by Heather Payne who requested approval for a place of assembly at 4695 Paul Payne Store Road. The size of the property is 6.37 acres, zoned RA-20, and the current land use is vacant, with the exception of a greenhouse. Zoning districts within 100 feet of the property are RA-20 on all sides.

After reviewing the findings of fact, Mr. Burgess explained that the applicant proposes using the greenhouse to offer educational opportunities and a meeting space for gardening and related interests as well as a potential private event venue and photography location. For any special use permit, the Board must consider review criteria to determine if the proposed use will have an adverse effect on the area and its citizens. Mr. Burgess provided staff observations in relation to those criteria and recommended approval with the following conditions:

1. All aspects of the project and its subsequent improvements shall comply with all applicable provisions of Alexander County's Land Development Ordinances and the Building and Fire Codes of the State of NC; and
2. Prior to the initiation of development, plans must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by Alexander County.

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

Public Comment

Applicant Heather Payne came forward, stating she was a lifelong resident of Alexander County and co-owner of "Those Plant Ladies," a landscaping and design business that educates and empowers women and children in the areas of horticulture and gardening. As a destination-wedding photographer, she has traveled the world and visited many amazing venues, which inspired her to create something new and beneficial for Alexander County.

There being no further comments, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Lail made a motion to approve Special Use Permit 23-01 with the following conditions:

1. All aspects of the project and its subsequent improvements shall comply with all applicable provisions of Alexander County's Land Development Ordinances and the Building and Fire Codes of the State of NC; and
2. Prior to the initiation of development, plans must be submitted, reviewed, and approved by Alexander County.

Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING: TEXT AMENDMENT 23-01 – FIRST TIME HOMES, LLC

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, presented Text Amendment 23-01 to Sections 154.202.1 and 154.160.2 of the Alexander County Zoning Ordinance that would allow single-family attached homes (townhomes) in the Floating Residential Single-Family Zoning District. Oscar Vasquez with First Time Homes, LLC, also owner of the only parcel in Alexander County zoned R-SF, has requested this text amendment along with caveats to lot size and width to make the allowance more functional.

The proposed amendment will place an X next to "townhomes" in the table of permitted uses known as Section 154.202.1 and add the following to Section 154.160.2:

(B) Single-family attached homes developed in this district shall have their side setback reduced to 0, and the minimum lot width to 20 ft.

Mr. Burgess advised that this request was reasonable by all state and local standards and that the Comprehensive Plan calls for the County to "promote affordable housing for people in all stages of life." Therefore, staff as well as the Planning & Zoning Commission recommend approval.

In response to a question by Vice-Chairman Lail, Mr. Burgess stated that the housing density on this parcel would remain at 7 homes per acre.

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

Public Comment

Attorney Robert Campbell, who represents Mr. Vasquez, reported that approx. 200 townhomes and small individual single-family homes were planned for this project located on a 34-acre tract off Heritage Farm Road. Mr. Vasquez currently has several developments in Catawba County and his approach to housing provides affordable options, especially for first-time homebuyers.

Vice-Chairman Lail said Alexander County was in need for affordable housing, especially when considering the influx of newcomers to the region.

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

Commissioner Reese made a motion to approve Text Amendment 23-01 to Sections 154.202.1 and 154.160.2 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 23-02 – VARIOUS AMENDMENTS

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, presented Text Amendment 23-02 to various sections of the Alexander County Zoning Ordinance as part of staff's continued review of the County's land development ordinances. The proposed amendments, recommended by staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission, included the following sections:

- 154.101 – changes the section title to Standards of General Applicability and adds specific wording related to outdoor lighting requirements.
- 154.113 – adds language specifying the maximum amount of time a temporary sign can be placed before a permanent sign permit is required.
- 154.330 through 154.332 – changes the Planning & Zoning Commission to be known as the Planning Board, adds in adoption of rules of procedures, and clarifies the duties of the Planning Board acting as the Board of Adjustment.
- 154.334(A) – grants the Planning Board to act as the Board of Adjustment for special use hearings instead of the Board of Commissioners and Taylorsville Town Council.
- 154.355 – gives staff authority to charge a fee of \$500 per day for violations that have gone unabated for more than 30 days to include temporary signs found in violation.
- 155 – creates a new chapter in the ordinance to address land use nuisances.

After a motion by Commissioner Yoder, second by Vice-Chairman Lail, 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 Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Due to concerns voiced by commissioners on several of the proposed amendments (specifically lighting, abandoned manufactured homes, and untagged vehicles), Commissioner Reese made a motion to table Text Amendment 23-02 to allow more time for review and discussion. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

(Because Mr. Burgess had already advertised for special use permit public hearings to be heard by the Planning Board on April 13, 2023, a special called meeting took place on Thursday, April 6, 2023 at 1:00 PM in the Clerk to the Board's office to approve proposed amendments to Sections 154.330 through 154.332 as well as Section 154.334(A)).

NORTHWOODS TRAVERSE SOFTWARE FOR DSS

Thomas Mitchell, DSS Director, discussed the need for a document management system for the Child Welfare, Adult Services, and Child Support units who do not yet have access to NCFAST. He introduced Chris Mease with Northwoods who reviewed the Traverse software that allows caseworkers to collect, view, and share case content from anywhere using the web-based application and companion mobile apps. Traverse will save staff approx. two hours each day by:

- reducing overall paperwork and streamlining the documentation process.
- improving timeliness and accuracy of case information.
- providing a uniform, consistent, and centralized source of information.
- eliminating administrative redundancies and duplication of effort.
- enabling caseworkers to spend more time interacting with clients in person.

There are currently 16 NC counties using the Traverse system, which is resistant to ransomware and stores encrypted data in the Northwoods cloud system instead of on county servers, greatly reducing county IT support. In addition, the system has 24/7 monitoring and full daily backups.

In response to several questions by the Board, Mr. Mease and Mr. Mitchell provided the following information:

- current paper case files will be scanned into the Traverse system.
- laptops or mobile phones will be used in the field to upload photos and case information (social workers already have iPhones so no additional equipment will need to be purchased).
- staff training time is estimated at approx. 13 weeks.
- the software can be integrated with public health if needed.
- there is a 3-year minimum and 5-year maximum contract term.

Michael Dodson, DSS Business Officer, advised that first-year costs would total \$184,000 (\$94,000 initial setup and \$90,000 annual subscription fee); however, both fees are eligible for reimbursement by the State at 50%. DSS has requested using FY 2023 contingency funds to begin the setup process so the system is fully functional by July 1, 2023. There will be no additional fees charged by Northwoods for repairs, updates, etc.

Commissioner Yoder requested that an itemized cost breakdown and funding plan be provided to the Board before any action was taken.

TOWN OF TAYLORSVILLE AGREEMENTS FOR BUILDING & FIRE INSPECTIONS SERVICES

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, presented two agreements with the Town of Taylorsville giving the County legal authority to perform 1) building inspections and 2) fire inspections within the Town's jurisdictional limits. Because property owners pay the fees for these inspections directly to either the Building Inspections Department or Fire Marshal's Office, the County will not charge the Town for these services. She advised that the agreements had been approved by the Town and no action was needed by the Board of Commissioners.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #53 - #55

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #53 - #55 follows:

Budget Amendment #53 – To increase the Sheriff’s Office budget for use of Federal Equitable Share Funds received during FY 2023 that will be used to purchase and install truck bed covers and boxes for 3 new patrol trucks as well as to purchase night vision goggles (\$4,200 annual goggle rental fee will be eliminated).

Budget Amendment #54 – To increase the Cooperative Extension budget for programming from additional funds that will be received during the remainder of FY 2023.

Budget Amendment #55 – To budget for the closeout of the Bethlehem Sewer Extension Project and transfer the remaining cash balance of Article 44*524 sales tax funds back to the General Fund.

Commissioner Reese made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #53 - #55. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS & REAPPOINTMENTS

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, requested appointments to the Local Emergency Planning Committee as follows – Sheriff Chad Pennell for 3 years (ending 12/2025) and David Himebaugh for two years (ending 12/2024).

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

OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items discussed during Other Business.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$1,885.04) for Tax Refunds (\$2,786.68) for February 25 – March 26, 2023.
- B. Minutes from the February 6, 2023 Regular Meeting and February 16, 2023 Special Called Meeting.
- C. March 2023 line item transfer report.
- D. Surplus the following vehicles for the Sheriff’s Office:
 - 2004 Chevy Tahoe, VIN #1GNEK13244R277971.
 - 2007 Toyota Corolla, VIN# 1NXBR32E27Z865849.
 - 2002 Ford Focus, VIN# 1FAFP343X2W253831.

- 2004 Nissan Murano, VIN# JN8AZ08W84W308463.
- 2008 Chevy Impala, VIN# 2G1WT58K989155595.
- 2017 Subaru Forester, VIN# JF2SJAEC0HH507347.
- 2005 Jeep Cherokee, VIN# 1J8HR58205C722885.

E. Surplus the following vehicles for the Public Works / Facilities Department.

- 2009 Dodge Charger, VIN# 2B3KA43V49H611762 with estimated 147,246 miles and broken odometer.
- 2010 Dodge Charger, VIN# 2B3AA4CT1AH303222 with 158,065 miles.
- 2010 Dodge Charger, VIN# 2B3AA4CT0AH303700 with 163,968 miles.
- 2007 Dodge Caravan, VIN# 1D4GP25R87B117162 with 193,325 miles.
- 2007 Honda Civic, VIN# JHMFA36277S009227 with 234,019 miles.
- 1994 Ford Ranger, VIN# 1FTCR14XXRPB39444 with 110,315 miles and blown engine.

F. Amended Rules of Procedure for the Alexander County Board of Commissioners.

G. Rules of Procedure for the Alexander County Planning Board.

H. Resolution in support of Paragon Films, Inc. expansion and NCDOT rail spur funding application.

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)(5 & 6) CONTRACTUAL & PERSONNEL

Vice-Chairman Lail made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:11 PM to discuss contractual matters and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5 & 6). Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 PM. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Marty A. Pennell, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board