

Draft

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**REGULAR MEETING**     December 4, 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  
                  Shane Fox, County Manager  
                  Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, December 4, 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.

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Vice-Chairman Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

No one spoke during the Public Comment Period.

**2022-2023 AUDIT REPORT**

Erica Brown with Martin Starnes & Associates gave a slide show presentation for the 2022-2023 Audit Summary, which included the following information:

- General Fund revenues – the top two sources of revenue are ad valorem taxes (property and motor vehicle taxes) at 46% and local option sales taxes at 29%. Remaining sources include restricted intergovernmental (federal and state grants) at 12%, sales and services (Health Department, Detention, EMS, License Plate Agency) at 8%, permits and fees (Inspections and Register of Deeds) at 2%, earned interest at 2%, and other (donations, private grants, ABC tax, video programming tax) at 1%. For FY 2023, ad valorem taxes increased by 3.5% and sales taxes increased by 8.2%
- General Fund expenditures – the top 4 overall expenses are public safety at 33%, human services at 25%, general government at 18%, and education at 16%. Remaining areas include debt service at 2%, culture and recreation at 3%, environmental protection at 2%, and economic and physical development at 1%. For FY 2023, public safety expenses increased by 14.7%, human services increased by 12%, education increased by 3.8%, and general government increased by 15.5%.
- General Fund debt – \$1,996,000 as of June 30, 2023; will be paid off in 2026.
- Fund Balance – 41.59% as of June 30, 2023 (\$25,006,616 total / \$19,978,985 available).
- Solid Waste Fund – budgetary net income of \$246,607.
- Water & Sewer Funds – budgetary net income of \$724,810 for Bethlehem Water Fund and \$642,314 for County Water & Sewer Fund. As of June 30, 2023 outstanding debt totaled \$4,479,370 for the Bethlehem Sewer Fund and \$6,797,818 for the County Water & Sewer Fund. Both will be paid off in 2041.

Ms. Brown advised that no general performance indicators or material weaknesses were found for 2022-2023.

## **COST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES STUDY**

Pamela Bowman, Soil & Water Conservation District Director, discussed interest in applying for an Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation grant to develop a Cost of Community Services Study for Alexander County, a tool to determine the fiscal contribution of existing land uses. Both the Soil & Water District Board of Supervisors and Farmland Preservation VAD Board have recommended this study, which will provide a snapshot of costs versus revenues for each type of land use and help local officials make informed land use and policy decisions.

The ADFP grant will total up to \$17,000 and will require a 30% match that can be provided as in-kind services. Applications are due by December 18, 2023 and recipients will be announced next fall. Ms. Bowman advised that a Cost of Community Services Study was the first step in

developing a Farmland Protection Plan, a need referenced in the updated Comprehensive Plan that will be adopted in early 2024.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to move forward with applying for the ADFP grant. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **CHRISTMAS IN BETHLEHEM PROCLAMATION**

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve a proclamation declaring December 1-31, 2023 as Christmas in Bethlehem. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the election of Josh Lail as Chairman for 2024. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed 4/1 (abstention by Vice-Chairman Lail).

### **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

Commissioner Herman made a motion approve the election of Ronnie Reese as Vice-Chairman for 2024. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed 4/1 (abstention by Commissioner Reese).

### **BOARD & COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board, requested the appointment of Mike Millsaps and Terry Church to the LEPC as well as the reappointment of Jon Miller, Patti Nelson, and Pamela Bowman, all for 3-year terms.

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

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$771.39) and Tax Refunds (\$45,278.41) for October 28 – November 26, 2023.
- B. Minutes from the November 6, 2023 Regular Meeting.
- C. Line Item Transfer Report for October 31 – November 6, 2023.
- D. NC Community College System FY 2023-2024 budget request sign-off form for CVCC.
- E. Personnel Policy Revision related to bonus leave.
- F. Resolution approving the official bond for the Alexander County Register of Deeds.

## G. Alexander County Flag Policy.

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

## COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORT

Shane Fox, County Manager, reviewed the following:

- In relation to the 2022-2023 audit results, Mr. Fox added that Alexander County had a diversified revenue portfolio and did not lean as heavily on property taxes as many counties similar in size. He thanked Finance staff for their assistance and cooperation, noting that our audit was the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> submitted to the state out of all 100 counties.
- The 76<sup>th</sup> Annual Alexander County Christmas Parade was a success thanks to department heads and staff who helped organize the event and volunteered on parade day.
- The draft Alexander County Comprehensive Plan is available on the County website for review. Staff plans to present the updated plan to the Board for approval in early 2024.
- The Senior Center will no longer be used as an early voting site due to the disruption of senior activities. Beginning in February 2024, the Administration Building first floor conference room will be utilized for this purpose.
- The Sugar Loaf convenience site is being relocated to 3300 Highway 16 North. The last day of operation at the current site will be December 11<sup>th</sup> and the new site will be open for business on Friday, December 15, 2023.
- Several of our large water and sewer projects will be put out to bid in the next month or two.
- Mr. Fox mentioned several upcoming dates to remember: Employee Christmas Lunch this Friday, County offices will be closed December 25 – 27, 2023 for Christmas and January 1, 2024 for New Year's, and the next County Commissioners' Meeting is scheduled for January 8, 2024.

## CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 6:42 PM, the Board transitioned into the Consolidated Human Services 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:
  - Current vacancies and staffing updates – there are two vacancies on the Consolidated Human Services Advisory Committee (ophthalmologist and engineer) and current staff vacancies include an Environmental Health Specialist and a Processing Assistant III.
  - Financial updates – an application has been submitted for a 2025 Community Health Grant to assist with providing primary and preventative care to uninsured and medically indigent patients. If awarded, the grant will provide \$150,000 each year for 3 years beginning with FY 2024-2025.
  - Accreditation update – NC Public Health Accreditation Benchmarks Activity 37.4 and Activity 37.5 require review and approval of the local health director’s job description as well as an annual performance evaluation by the Consolidated Human Services Board or CHS Director, which occurred in Closed Session and was approved by a unanimous vote.
  - Committee updates and events – goals met by the SUD Coalition include creation of a PORT Community Paramedic Program, middle and high school presentations, and community education at local churches. A SUD subcommittee is focusing on drug treatment court programs. Recent events include a Bridge Community Day, drive-thru and school employee flu clinics, initial Local Information Team Meeting that will continue quarterly, ICS training for management, and FIT testing for all staff.
  - Renovations – plans are being drawn for the covered entrance at the main Health Department building to protect clients from weather. This project is being paid with ELC COVID funds.
- DSS Report – Thomas Mitchell, DSS Director, stated that 10 new employees had been hired since September and 10 vacancies remain. Employee engagement events and quarterly community shelter meetings continue to be held. Other items discussed included:
  - Foster care / adoptions – there are currently 8 children eligible for adoption, 46 children in foster care, and 4 in the LINKS 18-21 Program. Two adoptions were finalized since October and MAPP training will take place this fall. A Foster Care & Adoption Awareness Carnival was held on November 11, 2023. Nearly 100 adults inquired about fostering/adoption and two families signed up for MAPP class information.

Vice-Chairman Lail pointed out that the quarterly DSS services report specifically related to Child Protective Services, foster care, and adoptions did not include information for September and October. In addition, he was also concerned that only two new foster home applications had been processed all year. Mr. Mitchell offered to investigate why updated numbers were left off the quarterly report and

he mentioned several issues that had caused delays with processing foster homes, which will hopefully no longer be an issue in 2024.

- Unit Spotlight / Medicaid – Several Medicaid staff members (Trenna Riddle, Adult & Economic Services Program Administrator; Kay Dayvault, Medicaid Program Evaluator; Ashley Gilbert, Family & Children’s Medicaid Supervisor; and Natasha Ktari, Adult Medicaid, Special Programs, and Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation Supervisor) reviewed specifics related to caseworker responsibilities for the 30 different Medicaid programs, 6 required audits, and ways the DSS has prepared for additional clients expected due to Medicaid expansion. The agency is already experiencing a significant increase in phone calls and Medicaid applications and there is concern with increased workload and not utilizing available State funding for extra staffing.
- Senior Center Report – Kristy Hunt, Senior Center Director, reviewed classes and events held during the last quarter and mentioned good attendance at the Health Fair in September, Medicare Open Enrollment Spooktacular in October, and Christmas Craft Fair this past Saturday. Diamond Tours trips planned for 2024 include Mt. Rushmore/Badlands/Black Hills in May, the Ark Encounter and Creation Museum in August, and Myrtle Beach in December. The Senior Center is organizing a Senior Share Closet (similar to an Angel Tree) to assist seniors during the Christmas season. Ms. Hunt was happy to report that staff had made 1,021 contacts related to Medicare since January and savings to date total \$860,786.

**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 7:23 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adjourn at 8:27 PM. Vice-Chairman Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

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Marty A. Pennell, Chairman

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Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board