

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING February 5, 2024

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

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

STAFF: Shane Fox, County Manager
 Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, February 5, 2024 in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina.

CALL TO ORDER

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

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Lail gave the invocation and Cooper James from Scouts Troop #275 led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. In addition, Aiden Guthrie led the reciting of the Scout Oath and Lee Julian led the Scout Law.

Members of Scouts Troop #275 along with Chloe Moose from Troop #1234 were present to earn their Citizenship in the Community Merit Badge.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Vice-Chairman Reese congratulated Alexander County native Kyle Troup who won the 2024 Professional Bowlers Association U.S. Open. He has also spoken with Mike Causey, NC Insurance Commissioner, who is opposed to the excessive increase for homeowners' insurance coverage proposed by the NC Rate Bureau.

Commissioner attendance at new business ribbon cuttings included Furever Pets Grooming, Bunce Buildings, and Golden Vine Massage & Wellness by Chairman Lail, Heritage Sandwich & Deli by Commissioner Pennell, and JH Appliance by Commissioner Herman.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one spoke during the Public Comment Period.

EMS 2023 UPDATE

Jeff Sigmon, EMS Director, began by providing the following statistics:

- Alexander County EMS responded to 8,206 calls for service in 2023, an increase of 634 calls from the previous year. Station #1 on Highway 90 received 5,280 calls (increase of 411), Station #2 in Bethlehem received 1,689 calls (increase of 224), and Station #3 on Highway 16 North received 1,165 calls (increase of 7 calls).
- Alexander Rescue Squad & EMS was put on standby 22 times during the year and also handled 8 calls. Surrounding counties were put on standby 4 times.
- Average time from dispatch to available for next call was 56:11 which is above the national average of 30 minutes. This is directly related to lack of a local hospital and routine transports to surrounding county hospitals. Average response time is 7:09 and less than the national average of 8 minutes. The longest response time for the year was 12:22 when multiple emergency calls occurred simultaneously.
- Top 5 calls in 2023 were falls, sick persons, breathing problems, traffic accidents, and unconsciousness.
- Fleet includes 5 paramedic-level ambulances and two Quick Response Vehicles. Three ambulances and one QRV are housed at Station #1 along with one ambulance and QRV at Station #2 and one ambulance at Station #3.
- Alexander County EMS operates 4 shifts with 12 medics per shift working a 24 hour on / 72 hour off schedule along with three 8am-5pm employees (EMS Director, Admin Assistant, and PORT / Community Paramedic). There are 51 full-time employees and 25 part-time at the following provider levels – basic EMT (9), advanced EMT (1), paramedic (65), PORT / Community Paramedic (1), along with several national registry, critical care, and tactical paramedics. There are currently 3 full-time vacancies.
- Staff participated in 2,220 hours of training in 26 areas such as childbirth, pediatric emergencies, cardiovascular emergencies, sepsis, seizures, and stroke management only to name a few.

Major Kevin Richards announced that Alexander County EMS was adding whole blood to the treatment formulary thanks to a partnership with Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist and Wilkes Medical Center Blood Bank. This capability, provided by only 12 other counties in NC, will allow crews to administer blood transfusions to patients who have suffered significant blood loss prior to being taken to a trauma center, increasing chances of survival. The Station #1 QRV will be stocked with whole blood, a mini biofridge, and blood warmer. Patients will be given tranexamic acid to promote clotting until the QRV arrives and the transfusion can begin. Any unused blood will be returned before its expiration. Major Richards also noted that, as an affiliate of this prehospital blood program, Atrium Health will send up to 20 units of red cells or whole blood to any mass casualty scene.

Shannon Childers, PORT / Community Paramedic, provided the following information related to the Alexander County Post Overdose Response Team Program:

- There has been a significant increase in overdoses and related deaths with 88 overdoses and two deaths in 2021, 94 overdoses and two deaths in 2022, and 152 overdoses and 14 deaths in 2023.
- In 2023, 68% of overdose patients were male and 32% were female, with an average age of 38. Narcan was administered 67 times with a 93% success rate and drugs of choice were unknown pills (29%), fentanyl (12%), and unknown opioids (9%).
- The PORT process begins with a referral from EMS, DSS, Sheriff's Office, Health Department, local doctor's office, area hospitals, school system, family or friends, etc. The PORT / Community Paramedic then makes contact within 24-72 hours and conducts an interview to discuss the client's substance use, connect them with available resources and support, and work with them as they follow the R.E.C.O.V.E.R.Y. Roadmap (recognize, educate, connect, overcome, volunteer, encourage, recover, yield). If help is denied, harm reduction materials are left such as xylazine and fentanyl test strips and Narcan.
- Plans for 2024 include efforts to recruit more peer support volunteers, adding a second PORT / Community Paramedic to provide a 24/7 rotation, expanding education opportunities (CPR and parenting classes, opioid use and Narcan training, AA / NA / and Al-Anon groups), and additional harm reduction options (Narcan vending machine, medication assisted therapy / bridge, and overdose kits for those who refuse services).

StRAP GRANT APPLICATION FOR STREAM DEBRIS REMOVAL

Pamela Bowman, Soil & Water Conservation District Director, discussed stream debris removal completed with \$384,805 in Stream Rehabilitation Assistance Program grant funds received in May 2022 that included 5 sites totaling 18,490 linear feet. After providing before and after photos, she stated that the District Board of Supervisors had recommended applying for a second round of StRAP funds totaling \$1,123,000 to address 28 remaining stream sites. Applications are due on

February 23rd and there is no local match required; funds are expended by the County and reimbursed at 100% within a few weeks after invoices are submitted. Ms. Bowman explained that a \$500,000 cap was placed on the first round of StRAP funds, which she expected again; however, grant administration will be handled in-house this time, leaving more funds for stream cleanup.

Commissioner Herman suggested looking into future grant projects to address beaver dams that are causing a large portion of debris in our streams.

INDUSTRIAL PARK SEWER EXTENSION PROJECT BID RECOMMENDATION

Shane Fox, County Manager, reported that a bid opening for the Industrial Park Sewer Extension Project was held on November 16, 2023 where 6 sealed bids were received. The lowest qualified bidder was Chad Sigmon Construction, LLC of Hickory, NC who submitted a bid of \$365,727 to install 2,400 linear feet of 8-inch gravity sewer to the 16-acre graded site in the Alexander Industrial Park. Project costs including construction, engineering and contingency, etc. total \$452,330 that will be paid entirely with grant funds through ARC and NCDEQ; no General Fund dollars will be spent.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to accept the low bid of \$365,727 and award the contract to Chad Sigmon Construction. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BETHLEHEM PARK IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT BID RECOMMENDATION

Shane Fox, County Manager, reported that a bid opening for the Bethlehem Park Improvements Project was held on January 16, 2024 where 3 sealed bids were received. The lowest qualified bidder was Lail Builders, Inc. from Hickory, NC (no affiliation to Chairman Lail) who submitted a bid of \$1,295,000. Mr. Fox discussed the history of Bethlehem Park that was established in the 1970's and acquired by the County in 1978. The last major update was completed in the 1990s (shelter and playground). Due to the high usage of this park and growth in the Bethlehem area, it was chosen to undergo a complete overhaul that will include a new concession stand with built-in picnic shelter and more restrooms, new playground with multiple play areas for various age groups, 8 pickleball courts in place of two tennis courts, resurfacing of two existing tennis courts, addition of basketball goals for two half-court areas, new lighting (steel poles and LED lights), converting the large baseball field to a permanent soccer field, new softball / baseball batting cages, ADA sidewalks and entry, along with milling, paving, and drainage work. The park will be closed for most of this year while construction occurs.

Project costs for construction, lighting, playground, engineering, and contingency total \$2,355,000 that will be paid with State-appropriated grants funds (\$750,000) and Article 44 sales tax monies; no General Fund dollars will be spent. In addition, the park's monthly energy costs will be cut in half once the new LED lights are installed.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to accept the low bid of \$1,295,000 and award the contract to Lail Builders. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #15 - #16 & PROJECT BUDGET ORDINANCE #P-1

Shane Fox, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #15 - #16 as well as Project Budget Ordinance #P-1 as follows:

Budget Amendment #15 – To increase the 1) Cooperative Extension budget for programming (spring plant sale, workshops, 4-H) from additional funds to be received during the remainder of FY 2024, 2) Library budget for a revised allocation of State Aid funds and donations received, 3) Sheriff’s Office budget to purchase 3 Dodge Chargers in FY 2024 while they are available to reduce the number of vehicles requested in FY 2025 and avoid long lead times, and 4) increase the Fire/Emergency Services budget for estimated costs of painting, driveway work, etc. to complete the Fire Training Facility.

Budget Amendment #16 – To budget for the Bethlehem Park Improvements Project based on bids received and also budget for the General Fund transfer to the Park Improvements Fund – Bethlehem Park.

Project Budget Ordinance #P-1 – To appropriate the 2023 State Appropriations Act General Funds Grants #20812-OSBM and #20813-OSMB as follows - \$300,000 for community grants and \$750,000 for the EMS Garage at Station #1.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #15 - #16 as well as Project Budget Ordinance #P-1. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$3,509.42) and Tax Refunds (\$10,934.26) for January 2-28, 2024.
- B. Minutes from the January 8, 2024 Regular Meeting.
- C. Historic Preservation Commission 2023 Annual Report.
- D. Request from the Public Works / Facilities Department to surplus a 2008 Toyota Rav 4 (VIN #JTMZD33V385103125) with 207,141 miles, a 2000 Chevy Silverado 2500 (VIN #1GCGK24U3YE269366) with 133,454 miles, a 545A Ford backhoe (SN-C663140 Model #DD312K) with 5,083 hours, a 2016 Ford Taurus (VIN #1FAHP2MT5GG1500952) with 129,646 miles, a 2018 Ford Explorer (VIN #1FM5K8ARXJGA6640) with 117,691 miles, and a 2016 Dodge Charger (VIN #2C3CDXAT3GH272796) with 132,916 miles.
- E. Resolution opposing the homeowners’ insurance rate increase requested by the NC Rate Bureau.
- F. Amendments to Library Policy: Materials Selection, Gifts and Donations, and Request for Reconsideration of Materials Sections.

G. Board / Committee Appointments – Library Board of Trustees and Region E Adult Care CAC.

Chairman Lail discussed specifics related to the homeowners' insurance rate increase proposed by the NC Rate Bureau and the negative impact it could have on property owners. He read aloud a resolution in opposition to this rate increase that will be shared with NC Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey.

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

COUNTY MANAGER'S REPORT

Shane Fox, County Manager, reviewed the following:

- A final walk-thru occurred at Wittenburg Access on January 10, 2024. The park is scheduled to re-open during Memorial Day weekend.
- A meeting was held with the group that spoke at our January Commissioners' Meeting about pickleball. They are interested in utilizing tennis courts at Jaycee Park as temporary pickleball courts. Staff is investigating the conditions of those courts to determine feasibility.
- Only two bids were received on January 30th for the Bowman Court Sewer Project; therefore, the bid request was reissued and a second bid opening is scheduled for February 13th at 2:00 PM.
- An RFQ for engineering services on the Sterling Road CDBG Project has been advertised with a deadline of February 29, 2024.
- Welding is taking place inside the Fire Training Facility and footers for the outdoor stairwell will be poured later this week. Improvements are also being made to the entry road.

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

Commissioner Herman made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:38 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adjourn at 8:31 PM. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Joshua D. Lail, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board