

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING March 4, 2024

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

PRESENT: Josh Lail, Chairman
 Ronnie Reese, Vice-Chairman
 Kent Herman
 Marty Pennell
 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, March 4, 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

Commissioner Herman gave the invocation and Chairman Lail led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

Commissioner Yoder recognized the ACHS Cheer Team for recently placing 7th in the Super Large D2 Non-Tumble Varsity Gameday Division at the National High School Cheerleading Championship in Orlando, FL. Before traveling to nationals, the team won first place at the Davidson College Spirit Invitational, first place at the Universal Cheer Association Piedmont Regional where they earned a bid to nationals, first place in their division as well as Grand Game Day Champions and overall high score at the All Day Cheerleading Piedmont Regional, fourth place at the NC High School Athletic Cheerleading Invitational, and first place at the NC Cheer Coaches Association State Championship.

Team members include Grant Sizemore (mascot), Laine Crouse, Tori Andras, Allyssa Barnes, Riley Parsons, Ella Bostian, Reese Buff, Peyton Seitz, Makenzi Hollingsworth, Grace Gomez, Aniyah Taylor, Laryn Echerd, Jordan Hughes, Tyna Little, Kadence Childers, Celeste Stikeleather, Lily Cornett, Cheyenne Honeycutt, Alyssa Bumgarner, Addison Head, Gracie Evans, Emma

Coley, Ella Preston, Makenna Harrell, Ava Hickerson, Bre Pennell, Raegan Sharpe, Cadee Rollins, and Mariah Miller. Coaches are Autumn Roberts, Mindy Severt, and Kelie Huffman.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Vice-Chairman Reese congratulated the Wittenburg Lady Wildcats for a perfect basketball season (zero losses at 16 games and pre-season/ end-of-season tournaments). Team members are Abigail Huffman, Ava Johnson, Lexi Carrigan, Macy Walker, Claire Presnell, and MaKenna Austin who are coached by Mark Presnell.

Chairman Lail thanked the Board of Elections and Elections staff for their efforts to make early voting a success and he encouraged everyone who had not already voted to do so tomorrow.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Chairman Lail requested the addition of two items to the Consent Agenda – proposed changes to Inspections permit fees and approval of a Lead-Based Paint Risk Assessor for the Sterling Road CDBG Project.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one spoke during the Public Comment Period.

OLD WITTENBURG SCHOOL RIGHT OF FIRST REFUSAL

Caryn Brzycky, Attorney for the Alexander County Board of Education, advised that an offer to purchase the Old Wittenburg School property had been received in the amount of \$600,000 for both parcels totaling 8.8 acres. Pursuant to N.C.G.S. 115C-518, this property was first offered to the Board of Commissioners in 2021 for \$889,739, who declined this option to purchase but chose the right of first refusal if an acceptable offer was made in the future. The School System has a firm written offer and Ms. Brzycky is holding earnest money until a written decision is received from the County.

Chairman Lail made a motion to decline the first right of refusal for the Old Wittenburg School property, allowing the Board of Education to move forward with the most recent offer of \$600,000. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Reese thanked the Board of Education for taking steps to resolve their budget shortfalls.

2045 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

Brian Burgess, Director of Planning & Development, gave an overview of the draft Alexander County 2045 Comprehensive Plan, which is now available for review on the County's website. The plan was created with input from the public through a series of community meetings and online survey as well as an appointed steering committee and the Planning Board.

Chapters of the plan include land use, transportation, economic development, housing, public services, environment & recreation, and historic & cultural resources. Each chapter features a narrative explaining the logic behind the recommendations in the plan, along with maps and other relevant information. A tiered system is also used to distinguish goals, objectives, and strategies; goals are "big picture," objectives are more focused, and strategies are ways to meet the goals.

Mr. Burgess reported that the draft 2045 Comprehensive Plan had a favorable recommendation from the Planning Board; therefore, a public hearing will be held on April 8th for consideration by the Board of Commissioners.

Shane Fox, County Manager, pointed out that these types of plans were typically outsourced at a price tag of approx. \$100,000. He thanked Mr. Burgess and his staff for doing this work in-house at very little cost to the County.

BOWMAN COURT SEWER PROJECT BID DISCUSSION

Shane Fox, County Manager, explained that because the minimum number of required bids were not received at the initial bid opening for the Bowman Court Sewer Project on January 30, 2024, a second advertisement was issued and another bid opening scheduled for February 13th pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-132(a). On this date, two bids were received; however, both were higher than the project budget. Mr. Fox recommended the Board reject both bids and allow staff to work with our engineers through McGill Associates to re-evaluate the project scope for possible cost savings before rebidding.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to reject the bids received for the Bowman Court Sewer Project and rebid once the scope of work has been reviewed. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #17 - #20

Shane Fox, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #17 - #20 as follows:

Budget Amendment #17 – To increase the following budgets – 1) DSS for Vaya Child Welfare funds to support, develop, and implement services to enhance the well-being of eligible children in the custody of Alexander County DSS, 2) Senior Center for a Senior Medicare Patrol Project grant from SHIP to host an Identity Theft Prevention Shred-a-

Thon and Fraud Prevention event, 3) Detention Center for the 2023 Byrne-JAC federal grant passed through the NC Governor's Crime Commission to purchase/install upgraded video surveillance cameras at the Detention Center, and 4) Sheriff's Office to purchase a K-9 vest with donated funds.

Budget Amendment #18 – To budget for true-up adjustments to pay out the June 30, 2023 fund balance amounts of the fire districts.

Budget Amendment #19 – To budget for the closeout of the Water System Extension Project and transfer the remaining cash balance of local funds back to the County Water & Sewer Fund.

Budget Amendment #20 – To adjust the multi-year grant project budget for the American Rescue Plan Special Revenue Fund in order to budget for interest earned on grant funds.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #17 - #20. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Fox thanked Finance staff as well as all departments for keeping budget amendments to a minimum, noting that 55 had been approved this same time last year along with 72 the year prior.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$1,952.64) and Tax Refunds (\$2,329.81) for January 29 – February 25, 2024.
- B. Minutes from the February 5, 2024 Regular Meeting.
- C. Line Item Transfer Report for February 2024.
- D. Resolution to transfer Ellendale School property back to the Alexander County Board of Education due to 2001 loan satisfaction.
- E. FY 2024 Audit Contract with Martin Starnes & Associates.
- F. Contract to purchase 2.533 acres in the Bethlehem Township as the location for the Bethlehem water tank.
- G. Resolution supporting the 2024 NCDOT Multimodal Planning Grant Initiative.
- H. Board / Committee Appointments – Equalization & Review Board, Farmland Preservation VAD Board, and I-CARE, Inc. Board of Directors.
- I. Resolution to surplus 18 Motorola VHF portable walkies to be conveyed to Central Alexander (Taylorsville) and Ellendale Fire Departments.
- J. Inspections permit fee changes to become effective April 1, 2024.
- K. Contract with One Source Environmental to serve as the Lead-Based Paint Risk Assessor for the Sterling Road CDBG Project.

Chairman Lail pointed out that the permit fee changes requested by Inspections were necessary to move away from the current fee determination method for new construction to eliminate confusion and also simplify the permitting process. Inspections will be going live with new software on April 1, 2024 and permits, pass/fail notifications, etc. will be handled electronically.

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:

- Individual meetings were held with County departments during the week of February 19-23, 2024 to discuss their FY 2024-2025 budget requests. He thanked all department heads and Finance staff for their willingness to meet, which was extremely helpful in early planning stages of developing a conservative, yet realistic budget for FY 2025.
- Bethlehem Park is now closed and improvements have begun. The concession building will be torn down this week and new lighting will be installed soon.
- Included in the Consent Agenda was a contract to purchase property behind PJ's Bethlehem Restaurant for the Bethlehem water tank. This State grant funded project will help resolve water pressure issues and accommodate future growth.
- Welding is complete at the Fire Training Facility. The containers will now be painted and gravel for the driveway will be delivered soon.
- We did not receive a minimum of 3 proposals in response to our engineering services RFQ for the Sterling Road CDBG Project so we must readvertise; however, 3 bids for submitted for lead-based paint services. Approval of the Consent Agenda included a contract with One Source Environmental to serve as the Lead-Based Paint Risk Assessor.
- The EMS garage at Station #1 will be bid out once the architect completes designs. The building will include a 5-bay garage, office area, and training / conference room.
- Construction began today on the new canopy at the Health Department, which will take approx. 6 weeks to complete.

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 6:48 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 still two vacancies on the Consolidated Human Services Advisory Committee (ophthalmologist and

engineer) and current staff vacancies include a Processing Assistant, Dental Assistant, and Environmental Health Specialist. Chelsie Ellis transferred into an Administrative Assistant position in December.

- Workforce Development Plan Policy #Adm. 5.56 (Accred. 37.6) – in an effort to recruit and be competitive, staff will begin participating in job fairs at local schools and universities that offer Environmental Health programs. In addition, environmental health specialty students will have the opportunity to intern in our Environmental Health Department.
- Financial updates – staff has been working on budget preparations for FY 2025 and will submit a finalized budget request to Finance by this Friday. Fee changes will be pushed to the June CHSB Meeting to align with the start of the fiscal year.
- Accreditation updates – we are now at the 2-year mark of the 4-year accreditation process. A 90-day notification letter is expected by March 1, 2026 and onsite and remote reaccreditation surveys should begin in September or October 2026.
- Board member orientation / annual training (Accred. 34.1, 36.1, 36.2, 36.3) – Ms. Walker presented the annual BOCC Health & Services Board training that is required by the NC Local Health Department Accreditation benchmarks. This training provides the Board with important information about their rule-making duties and advocacy roles and keeps them updated on emerging governance and public health issues. Ms. Walker stated that the CHS Board Operating Policy & Procedures (Adm. 3.02) and CHS Board Policy on Policies (Adm. 3.05) were emailed to each CHSB member for review (see attached documents). Signatures are required on the CHSB Annual Review Acknowledgement Statement and BOCC Annual Review Guide 2024.
- Situational reports – Ms. Walker introduced Kaitlyn Graves, Health Educator, who presented the 2023 State of the County Health Report (SOTCH) (Accred. 1.3) to the Board. This report is created each year that the Community Health Assessment (CHA) isn't required. It is reviewed by the State and is held to the standards/activities established for accreditation and provisions located in the consolidated agreement. DPH will inform the Health Department by formal letter as to whether the SOTCH meets all activities required for accreditation. Priorities remained the same with the exception of a recommendation by the State to split mental health and substance abuse disorder into two separate priorities, making a total of 5 priorities for our county to work on. These priorities include - #1 mental health, #2 substance use disorder, #3 healthy living, #4 child care and parenting, #5 elder care.

Ms. Graves also presented the Strategic Plan and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) (Accred. 9.1, 15.1, 22.1) for the cycle of 2023-2026. The plan coincides with the CHA cycles and was developed with the management team,

which consists of all supervisors. A SWOT analysis was completed to identify priorities to focus on. Progress made on key priorities is listed below:

Mental Health – a Licensed Clinical Social Worker was hired and 54 clients were served within a year. In addition, 156 students participated in the Risky Behaviors Program taught at the local high school.

Substance Use Disorder – the PORT Community Paramedic responded to 33 calls within 3 months and also distributed 55 kits, 412 youth were served through SUD prevention and education classes along with 9 community leaders and 3 churches, and 174 lock boxes were distributed.

Healthy Living – there were 199 participants in nutrition classes, staff sponsored a booth at the County Employee Wellness Fair, and a letter of support was submitted for the County Multimodal Planning Grant. Media campaigning included 32 Facebook posts.

Elder Care – 79 seniors were reached through senior education programs.

Childcare and parenting – 14 System of Care (SOC) Grant meetings were hosted.

- Renovations (Accred 5.2 & 5.3) – work began today on the front entrance canopy, which will take approx. 6 weeks to complete. In the meantime, Ms. Walker encouraged the public to observe all temporary directional signage.
- Senior Center Report – Kristy Hunt, Senior Center Director, stated that participation had continually increased over the past two years with bingo and birthday lunches as the most popular event, filling to capacity each month. The Musician’s Jam held every Monday at 10:00 AM is now live on YouTube and all appointments with AARP volunteers for tax preparation are booked. Upcoming classes/events include a pre-diabetes seminar, shred-a-thon and medication drop, and “Healthy Living with Chronic Disease” in March, a gardening class in April, along with tie-dye t-shirts, barn quilt painting, and the 2024 Senior Celebration in May. Day trips will resume in March and Diamond Tours trips will include Mt. Rushmore/Badlands/Black Hills, the Ark Encounter and Creation Museum, and Myrtle Beach. Ms. Hunt was happy to report that for 2023, staff made 1,122 contacts related to Medicare plans with a savings of \$1,316,652 for our citizens.
- DSS Report – Shane Fox, County Manager, reviewed recent new hires for the agency, noting that the current vacancy rate for the past month was 12% and that turnover had reduced as of late. The DSS Director job posting closed on February 14th with 11 qualified applicants; interviews are scheduled for next week. There are currently 59 children in DSS custody, including 4 out-of-state placements and 4 in the LINKS 18-21 Program. We currently have 18 licensed foster homes in Alexander County and no adoptions were processed for the months of December 2023 and January 2024. There are 60 open CPS cases/investigations and we have 13 adult wards. Medicaid applications spiked in

December when Medicaid Expansion launched but have fallen since the initial enrollment period. Mr. Fox mentioned a new meal site and expanded offerings for the Congregate Meal Program and briefly mentioned a recent food drive that resulted in the collection of 479 items that were donated to the Christian Crisis Center.

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

Chairman Lail made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:25 PM to discuss economic development, contractual matters, and personnel issues pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to adjourn at 8:34 PM. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Joshua D. Lail, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board