

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING June 3, 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 / Interim County Manager
 Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, June 3, 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 Vice-Chairman Reese led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Herman, who attended the May Farmland Preservation VAD Board Meeting, reported that a total of 11,562 acres of Alexander County farmland now participated in the Voluntary Agricultural District Program.

Vice-Chairman Reese attended the most recent event in the Summer Concert Series at Courthouse Park, The Whisnants on Saturday, June 1.

Commissioner Yoder advised that the WPCOG Policy Board had passed a resolution opposing the Charlotte interbasin transfer request on behalf of the entire Unifour area.

Chairman Lail and Commissioner Pennell discussed the grand opening of the Wittenburg Access swim beach on May 24th and were grateful for the partnership with Duke Energy to make improvements to this park.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

After submitting a revised list of board / committee appointments for Consent Agenda, Chairman Lail made a motion to adopt the agenda as amended. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Bud Caywood spoke in opposition to Charlotte's IBT request, noting that he was among a large crowd that attended the May 8th public meeting held at the Ridgeview Branch Library in Hickory where many questions were asked but very few answers given. He also plans to attend the 6th public meeting scheduled for July 15th at the CoMMA Performing Arts Center in Morganton and he encouraged regular updates on this topic in local news.

ADOPTION OF 2024-2025 ALEXANDER COUNTY BUDGET ORDINANCE

Ben Faulkenberry, County Attorney / Interim County Manager, presented the FY 2024-2025 Alexander County Budget Ordinance that totaled \$56,589,979 (a 2% decrease from current year) and included a 2-cent property tax reduction, 5% COLA and Christmas bonuses for employees, half-cent fire tax increase for the Vashti Fire District, continued focus on public safety, and additional funding for Alexander County Schools for the Fire Academy and NC Pre-K Program. Mr. Faulkenberry thanked Finance staff and department heads for their work to prepare the proposed budget.

Commissioner Herman, who voted against the 2023-2024 budget due to the increased property tax rate following revaluation, felt this budget was a step in the right direction. He was happy to offer some relief to taxpayers as well as a pay increase for employees.

Commissioner Pennell was concerned that reducing the property tax rate, when combined with slow growth and loss of sales tax revenue, would affect the County's ability to fund capital needs and infrastructure, recruit and retain employees through competitive salaries, and provide services to citizens while also keeping up with continued inflation. In addition, he stated that a 2-cent tax decrease would provide minor savings for taxpayers; about \$50 per year for the median home value of \$272,500 and about \$10 per year for a 100-acre farm; however, it equates to \$816,000 in lost revenue for the County. Based on current stats and projections, he felt the proposed tax decrease was premature and he preferred to offer tax reductions that would be more financially worthwhile to citizens.

Commissioner Yoder was also opposed to cutting property taxes, mainly due to loss of Medicaid Hold Harmless Funds and declining sales tax revenue. He stated that the County was in great financial shape, something he hoped to maintain, but he was concerned that reducing property taxes by 2 cents now would lead to a 4-cent increase later, or use of fund balance.

Vice-Chairman Reese felt the proposed budget was a good balance that benefited County employees as well as our citizens. He was pleased to be able to provide a tax cut and optimistic that revenues would continue coming in, also noting that NC counties had the ability to shorten the timeframe between scheduled revaluations to reduce sticker shock.

Chairman Lail said this was the best budget he'd been a part of because it reduced the tax burden on citizens while also increasing benefits to employees. Like Vice-Chairman Reese, he was optimistic that Alexander County would experience growth that would add to the tax base, also pointing out that the County could operate for nearly 6 months with no revenue thanks to a current fund balance of approx. 41%, something he was very proud of. He felt the proposed budget was a close representation of what would be spent and that differing opinions among the Board was proof that each commissioner had the best interest of the county at heart.

With no further comment, Commissioner Herman made a motion to approve the FY 2024-2025 Alexander County Budget Ordinance as presented. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed 3 in favor (Commissioners Herman, Lail, and Reese) and 2 against (Commissioners Pennell and Yoder). The motion carried.

RESOLUTION OPPOSING CHARLOTTE'S INTERBASIN TRANSFER REQUEST

Ben Faulkenberry, County Attorney / Interim County Manager, provided specifics related to the City of Charlotte's recent request for an additional 30 million gallons per day from the Catawba River Basin. In 2002, Charlotte received approval from NCDEQ / Environmental Management Commission to transfer 33 MGD from the Catawba River Basin to the Rocky River Basin. In 2005, Concord and Kannapolis requested 36 MGD from the Catawba; however, after extensive public debate, a compromise was approved in 2007 for only 10 MGD that is also reduced during times of drought. Charlotte's current request is to increase the amount of water it receives from the Catawba River Basin from 33 MGD to 63 MGD, which has caused concerns that additional IBTs will limit the amount of water available to support growth in our area.

Chairman Lail stated that the demand for water resources in rural areas was in high demand due to the influx of people leaving big cities and he discussed a recent U.S. News & World Report article that ranked the Hickory Metro Area as the 26th best place in the country to live in 2024-2025. For this reason, he was against Charlotte taking another drop of water from the Catawba River Basin.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the resolution opposing the City of Charlotte's IBT request. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

RESOLUTION DIRECTING EXPENDITURE OF OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS

David Moose, Consolidated Human Services Director, presented a resolution authorizing the 2024-2025 expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds as follows:

- Strategy #1 - \$450,000 to expand the Post Overdose Response Team / Community Paramedic Program to include a second full-time PORT Community Paramedic (along with vehicle and needed equipment), two part-time Peer Support Specialist positions, and additional training opportunities.
- Strategy #2 - \$16,000 to stock two harm-reducing vending machines with Naloxone (Narcan) and other supplies. Grant funding through BCBSNC was used to purchase the vending machines that will be located at the Mobile Café and in the Stony Point area.

Since January 1st, there have been 47 overdoses and two opioid related deaths in Alexander County with an average age of 36 years old; 49% female and 51% male. Fentanyl is the commonly abused drug, followed by methadone and opioids; however, Narcan has a 98% success rate in reversing an overdose.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve the resolution authorizing the expenditure of \$466,000 in Opioid Settlement Funds for 2024-2025 as requested. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #28 - #32 & PROJECT BUDGET ORDINANCE #P-3 FOR BOWMAN COURT SEWER PROJECT

Ben Faulkenberry, County Attorney / Interim County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #28 - #32 as well as Project Budget Ordinance #P-3 for the Bowman Court Sewer Project as follows:

Budget Amendment #28 – To adjust the General Fund for FY 2024 personnel costs that differ from original budget estimates due to vacation payouts to employees leaving service, approved salary adjustments, and Christmas bonuses.

Budget Amendment #29 – To adjust the Solid Waste Fund for FY 2024 personnel costs that differ from original budget estimates.

Budget Amendment #30 – To 1) increase the Library budget for revised State Aid funds, the Detention Center budget for estimated medical supplies and inmate medical bills for the remainder of FY 2024, and interest revenue based on year-to-date earnings that are higher than expected, 2) decrease sales tax revenue estimates based on year-to-date collections that are lower than expected, and 3) adjust the DSS budget for Social Services Representative Payee Client revenues and expenses, which offset each other.

Budget Amendment #31 – To increase the General Fund due to GASB 96 that governs the accounting treatment of Subscription-Based Information Technology Arrangements (this is only a book entry required for financial statement presentation; no additional expenses will be incurred and there will be no effect on the fund balance).

Budget Amendment #32 – To increase the General Fund due to GASB 87 that governs the accounting treatment of leases (this is only a book entry required for financial statement presentation; no additional expenses will be incurred and there will be no effect on the fund balance).

Project Budget Ordinance #P-3 – To budget for the Bowman Court Sewer Project to construct a pump station and associated 8-inch force main.

Commissioner Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #28 - #32 as well as Project Budget Ordinance #P-3 for the Bowman Court Sewer Project. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$252.94) and Tax Refunds (\$207.80) for May 13-27, 2024.
- B. Minutes from the May 6, 2024 and May 20, 2024 Regular Meetings.
- C. Home and Community Care Block Grant for SFY 2024-2025.
- D. Board / Committee Appointments – Tax Assessor/Admin, Tax Collector, Historic Preservation Commission, and Region E Aging Advisory Committee.
- E. Updates to the Emergency Management Ordinance and Fee Schedule.
- F. DSS Energy Programs Outreach Plan for 2024-2025.

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

COUNTY MANAGER’S REPORT

No items were discussed during the County Manager’s Report.

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 7:22 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:

- Organizational updates (Accreditation Benchmark 37.6) – there are still two vacancies on the Consolidated Human Services Advisory Committee (ophthalmologist and engineer) and current staff vacancies include a Dental Assistant, Environmental Health Administrative Assistant, and Environmental Health Intern.
- Financial updates (Accreditation Benchmarks 33.2, 33.6, 39.2, and 41.3) – Ms. Walker discussed budget timeline activities and a vehicle request for the new Environmental Health employee that was included in the 2024-2025 budget that was just approved. She also reviewed the fee approval process and proposed fee changes for 2024-2025, noting that the fee policy, program fees, and methodology of setting fees had been discussed during several staff meetings prior to presenting the following fee adjustments for consideration:
 - Environmental Health – several increases for new construction / expansion to keep up with other local fees and addition of new fees for residential repair of 4 bedrooms or less.
 - General Clinic – no changes.
 - Dental Clinic – no changes.
 - Behavioral Health – one increase on a diagnosis fee due to Medicaid increase.
 - Immunizations – several increases due to insurance reimbursement rate increases.
 - Lab (Fetal Congenital Assay) – this had not been added to the price list since the state offered it until last year.

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to approve the fee increases as presented. Commissioner Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Ms. Walker also made the Board aware that the Health Department was not chosen for the SFY25 NC Community Health Grant because of a decrease in funding and other counties scoring higher on their healthcare needs. Staff will reapply next year.

- Accreditation updates (Benchmarks 15.3, 24.1, 24.2, 37.2, and 37.6) – Ms. Walker gave a Public Health Policy update, noting that the Board was given copies of all policies by email to review prior to tonight’s meeting and all changes were submitted with the packet. In addition to changes to all policy headers, the number of titles required to sign has been decreased to the Health Director / Medical Director, or BOCC/DON/Other. Submitted policy changes included:

<u>Policy No.</u>	<u>Policy Name</u>	<u>Reason</u>
Adm-3.02	CHS Board Operating Policy and Procedures	Made null and void due to consolidation process by BOCC governing body who have their own operating procedures

Adm-3.04	Chain of Command	#5 – changed the Accounting Technician title to Accounting Specialist #6 – took out “page” and added “available by cell phone or email”
Adm-3.05	CHS Board Policy on Policies	A. Definitions – removed “Humans’ and fixed line/spacing
Adm-5.05	Basic Nutritional Assessment of Patients	Discontinuing; policy no longer needed
Adm-5.11	Cultural Sensitivity & Competency	Updated verbiage to be less wordy and more straight forward
Adm-5.16	Educational Leave	Discontinuing; combining with Adm-5.47
Adm-5.42	Referral Sources	Changed CC4C to CMARC and added Behavioral Health to Internal Referral
Adm-5.47	Staff Orientation, Education & Workforce Plan	Changed title to Staff Orientation, Continuing Education & Annual Training. This policy contains 3 policies with similar verbiage per QI from Accreditation.
Adm-5.48	Staff Orientation & Checklist	Combining with Adm-5.47
Adm-5.49	Students / Volunteers	Edited to include Intern verbiage to reflect County Policy
Adm-5.53	Training for Employees	Discontinuing; combining with Adm-5.47
Adm-5.54	Visitors	Discontinuing; no longer needed and combining Adm-5.49
Adm-5.56	Workforce Development Plan	Minimal verbiage changes

Chairman Lail made a motion to approve the requested policy changes. Vice-Chairman Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Ms. Walker also reviewed all Agreement Addendas for 2024-2025 along with funding amounts attached to each, which require goals and objectives to be met prior to being able to pull down funding from the state.

- Situational reports (Accreditation Benchmarks 5.2 and 5.3) – several renovations have been completed that not only upgraded the appearance of the facility, but also improved workspaces and storage areas for better staff efficiency. The new covered entrance offers a weather barrier for patients as well as a prescreening / testing area if needed. Ms. Walker also discussed upcoming community education outreach events and mentioned work that the Health Department was doing with the Substance Use Coalition, noting that Shannon Childers, PORT / Community Paramedic, had been very successful in a short amount of time with assisting those struggling with addiction.

Commissioner Pennell asked if the brick work on the new covered entrance had been completed by ACHS students and also if the exposed wood around the eaves and window boxes at the Health Department that was decayed had been repaired. Ms. Walker replied that the wood had not yet been replaced and was unsure of who performed the brick work, but would find out and relay that information to the Board.

- Senior Center Report – Kristy Hunt, Senior Center Director, announced that the center had over 100 calls or visits today from seniors to sign up for bingo and birthday lunches (those who did not make it onto the list were automatically added to next month's roster). Photos of events and classes held during the last quarter were shown, including the Identity Theft Shred-a-Thon and Operation Medication Drop where 2,600 pounds of documents were destroyed and 42 pounds of medication collected. Upcoming events include a special evening Musician's Jam on June 25 and Operation Fan Heat Relief beginning on July 3, a new cardio drumming exercise program is in the works, and ARPA Congregate Nutrition Funds will be used to provide free meals to local seniors. Ms. Hunt was happy to report that since January, staff had assisted 148 seniors with their Medicare drug plan, saving them \$131,139.
- DSS Report – David Moose, Consolidated Human Services Director, presented on behalf of new DSS Director Keri Jerrell who was teaching a MAPP class and could not attend tonight's meeting. Although DSS is still experiencing staffing shortages in the Child Welfare Department, Economic Services will be fully staffed as of June 10. All available funding allocations, both state and federal sources, have been drawn down including \$100,520.29 in additional Medicaid Expansion funds. Mr. Moose stated that the NCDOT 5310 Transportation Program Audit was complete with all guidelines fully met and the state fiscal review of DSS financial operations has been extended to every two years thanks to our previous low-risk ratings. A recent REDA Medicaid Audit was conducted and only two paybacks totaling \$75.63 were found out of 200 Medicaid cases pulled. Current CPS/APS stats included 59 children in DSS custody, 48 open CPS assessment/ investigation cases, and 10 adult wards. There are 15 foster homes in Alexander County; however, tonight's MAPP training will result in 4 additional licensed homes starting in August.

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

Vice-Chairman Reese made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:59 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, Commissioner Yoder made a motion to adjourn at 8:50 PM. Chairman Lail seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Joshua D. Lail, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board