

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING February 3, 2025

ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

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

STAFF: Ben Faulkenberry, County Attorney
 Gary Herman, PIO
 Todd Herms, County Manager
 Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a regular meeting on Monday, February 3 2025, 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 Chairman Pennell led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

No reports were given.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Local foster parent Paul Kelly spoke in favor of the Special Children Adoption Incentive Fund Program for the benefits it could provide to support foster children with special needs. His family has cared for a foster child for 16 months; however, they are reluctant to proceed with adoption due to the child's significant needs. He felt the SCAIF Program could assist his family, as well as others, with the financial burden of providing long-term care to these children.

Tennille Hileman, Guardian ad Litem District Administrator, said she worked closely with foster children and families and saw firsthand how financial challenges hindered the ability to find suitable adoptive placements. She believes the SCAIF Program would enhance the willingness of individuals to foster and adopt while also expediting the transition of foster children out of the system, which would decrease the County's expenses. In addition, Ms. Hileman also expressed concerns with current CPS vacancies at DSS and gave suggestions on ways to boost recruitment such as higher salaries and sign-on bonuses.

Don Taylor gave an update on the process to incorporate Bethlehem, noting that the Board of Elections had certified the petition containing over 1,000 signatures and the City of Hickory has agreed not to oppose incorporation. A town charter has been drafted and boundaries determined, a tax rate has been set, and several proposals for contracted services have been received. Mr. Taylor said he was working with the NC Local Government Commission to obtain a financial certificate and once received, an incorporation packet will be submitted to the Municipal Incorporation Subcommittee of the NC General Assembly.

Marie Taylor stated that the purpose of incorporating Bethlehem was to preserve the character of the community through responsible growth and to ensure the direct benefit of tax dollars. She was unhappy that the Land Development Code designated Bethlehem as an urban growth center and felt the Board's decisions were primarily focused on the overall welfare of the entire county, which might not reflect the best interests of Bethlehem.

SPECIAL CHILDREN ADOPTION INCENTIVE FUND

Keri Jerrell, DSS Director, presented information about the Special Children Adoption Incentive Fund, a state program that supports the adoption of children with special needs by providing additional financial support to families willing to adopt children with qualifying special needs. These payments are funded by the participating county (50%) and the state (50%) to assist with medical care, therapy, specialized education, etc. and continue monthly until the child reaches the age of 18.

Ms. Jerrell explained the process to opt into the program and said that to date, 33 of the 100 counties in NC participate in SCAIF. There are currently 6-10 foster children in Alexander County that may qualify; however, actual budgetary impacts may prove difficult to estimate due to the many variables that affect payment rates.

Chairman Pennell said there were many state-level rules and regulations that have created obstacles for individuals seeking to foster and adopt, particularly in smaller counties. He requested Ms. Jerrell explore the possibility of implementing changes to these regulations.

RESOLUTION TO ADVANCE REAPPRAISAL SCHEDULE & IMPLEMENT A 4-YEAR CYCLE

Todd Herms, County Manager, provided a variety of statistics related to reappraisal schedules in counties across the state, noting that over half utilized a 4-year cycle. He discussed the benefits of moving from our current 8-year cycle to every 4 years, noting that on average, NC counties with a 4-year cycle have lower property tax rates (57 cents vs. 71 cents). In addition, an 8-year revaluation would cost almost \$900,000 to complete, while a 4-year cycle would cost approx. \$300,000, but with added staff time.

Mr. Herms pointed out that he was not advocating for more taxes; rather, he emphasized the importance of the County being as accurate as possible with its tax revaluation to establish an appropriate tax rate. Implementing a 4-year cycle would provide a clearer picture of the County's tax base trajectory that would assist with financial stability and long-term planning. He also stated that a 4-year cycle could lesson the blow to property owners compared to an 8-year cycle.

Vice-Chairman Yoder felt conducting revaluations every 4 years would be a more equitable approach.

Commissioner Lail agreed and stated that, while the County required a specific amount of funding to operate and maintain services, the Board aimed to avoid imposing unnecessary financial burdens on property owners.

Commissioner Reese made a motion to approve the resolution to advance Alexander County's reappraisal schedule from January 1, 2031 to January 1, 2027 and implement subsequent reappraisals every 4 years. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #23 - #24

Todd Herms, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #23 - #24 as follows:

Budget Amendment #22 – To increase:

- the Health Department budget for additional federal funds for farmworker flu vaccines as well as state grant funds for child fatality case reporting.
- the DSS budget to use United Way grant funds carried forward from a prior budget year.

Budget Amendment #23 – To budget for deobligation of remaining NC Department of Commerce grant funds for the Hancock & Moore Building Renovation Project due to circumstances that prevented the company from meeting all of the requirements to draw down the full grant amount.

Commissioner Reese made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #22 - #23. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$1,778.52) and Tax Refunds (\$34,889.99) for December 30, 2024 – January 26, 2025.
- B. Minutes from the January 6, 2025 Regular Meeting.
- C. Line-Item Transfer Report for January 2025.
- D. Board / Committee Appointments – Sister Cities Association and Council on Aging.
- E. Resolution to appoint Patrick Creech as a Review Officer.
- F. Resolution Adopting the Unifour Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- G. Historic Preservation Commission 2024 Annual Report.
- H. Proposed revisions to Personnel Policy – Sick Leave.
- I. Request to surplus the following 5 mowers – 61” Revolt Vanguard EFI 28hp, Serial #BRV6128EVG05240001 with 112 hours; 60” Snapper Zero Turn, Serial #2017782582 with 1,747 hours; 60” Snapper Zero Turn, Serial #2017687911 with 1,684 hours; 60” Snapper Zero Turn, Serial #4000062877 with 1,212 hours; 60” Snapper Zero Turn, Serial #40000784275 with 1,378 hours.

Vice-Chairman 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)(4, 5, & 6) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, CONTRACTUAL, & PERSONNEL

Commissioner Reese made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 6:58 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 Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Marty A. Pennell, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board