

Draft

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING March 10, 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, March 10, 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 Lail gave the invocation and Vice-Chairman Yoder led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Several comments were made regarding a recent trip to Washington D.C. for the NACo Legislative Conference attended by Commissioners Pennell, Lail, and Yoder as well as County Manager Todd Herms. In addition to informative sessions and discussions, they also met with staff of U.S. Senators Thom Tillis and Ted Budd to discuss priorities and needs in Alexander County.

Commissioner Lail announced that the 1st annual Bethlehem Spring Fest was being planned for May 17th at the newly renovated Bethlehem Park facility.

Commissioner Herman was recently informed that the Army Corps of Engineers would be contacting those who own property near bridges in Alexander County to discuss stream debris removal caused by Hurricane Helene and other past storms.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tennille Hileman, Guardian ad Litem District Administrator, expressed her concerns about foster home licensing, noting that the number of licensed foster homes in Alexander County had dwindled from 32 to only 16 in a few short years. As a former DSS employee, she believed this problem was a direct result of high turnover in the CPS unit caused by overworked staff, unqualified supervisors, and lack of support which has caused frustration among foster families, leading them to transfer their license elsewhere. She also pointed out the financial strain to the County budget and added stress to social workers when children are placed in foster homes outside of the county.

Brenda Price, who has fostered over 200 children, said she had spoken with several foster parents, current and past social workers, and child advocates who reported unacceptable issues at DSS that were jeopardizing court cases, delaying foster home licensure and adoptions, and causing social workers to resign. She had knowledge of one child that had 9 different foster care social workers in less than two years. Ms. Price urged the Board to take immediate action and demand accountability to improve the agency.

George Holleman, Mayor of Taylorsville and member of the Disciples Dispelling the Darkness group, requested that the Board adopt a proclamation naming May 1, 2025 as National Day of Prayer in Alexander County. He gave the history of the event which began in 1775 with the Continental Congress and was reaffirmed in 1952 by President Harry Truman and also by President Ronald Regan in 1988.

Tyler Brown, a lifelong Bethlehem resident and business owner, spoke in opposition to the proposed incorporation of the Bethlehem community along with the additional taxes and regulatory measures that would accompany it. Due to the overwhelming majority of Bethlehem residents that are against incorporation, he has spoken with legislators about the importance of holding a referendum to allow all voices to be heard and he encouraged others to do the same. For more information, visit www.bethlehemnc.com, the Bethlehem Residents Against Incorporation & More Taxes Facebook page, and the Let's Talk Bethlehem podcast.

PUBLIC HEARING: TEXT AMENDMENT 25-01 – LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE

Patrick Creech, Senior Planner, presented Text Amendment 25-01 to various sections of the Alexander County Land Development Code. The proposed amendments were reviewed by the Planning Board on February 13, 2025 and, in addition to typographical error corrections, include the following:

- Section 154.53 – inserts language related to Historic Preservation Overlay Districts.
- Section 154-60, SR 4.12 – expands definition of a recreational sports facility to allow lawnmower racing.
- Section 154-88 – clarifies Conservation Subdivision Standards section, adds requirement to submit an open space management plan, and removes language that applies to commercial property and is not enforceable in residential subdivisions.
- 154-243 – changes the effective date for Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control (stormwater) regulations to March 1, 2026.

Mr. Creech explained that all amendments, if approved, would be effective immediately with the exception of the stormwater regulations.

After a motion by Vice-Chairman Yoder, second by Commissioner Herman, and unanimous vote, the public hearing was called to order and comments requested. There being none, Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to close the public hearing. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve Text Amendment 25-01 to the Land Development Code. Commissioner Lail seconded the motion, which passed 4 in favor (Commissioners Herman, Lail, Pennell, and Yoder) and one against (Commissioner Reese). The motion carried.

ARPA WATER EXPANSION PROJECT BID AWARD RECOMMENDATION

R.J. Mozeley, McGill Associates Senior Project Manager, advised that a bid opening for the ARPA Water Expansion Project was held on February 11, 2025 where 4 sealed bids were received. The lowest qualified bidder was Bell Construction Company, Inc. who submitted a base bid of \$3,867,205 to install water service along Stan-De-La Drive, Greene Street, Caldwell Pond/John Cline Roads, Jenkins Moose Road, McAlpin Lane, Advent Church Road, Shepherd Court, Hefner Lane, Kirby Lackey/Glass Roads, and Shook Lane/Jimmy Shook Lane. An alternate bid of \$214,463 for Hickory Hollow Lane was also submitted, bringing the total bid amount to \$4,081,668. Mr. Mozeley also recommended that a construction contingency of 5% be established to cover any quantity overruns or unforeseen circumstances.

Commissioner Reese made a motion to accept the low bid of \$4,081,668 for the ARPA Water Expansion Project and award the contract to Bell Construction Company. Vice-Chairman Yoder seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

STERLING ROAD CDBG PROJECT ENGINEER RECOMMENDATION

Paul Teague, WPCOG Community & Economic Development Administrator, informed the Board that 4 engineering proposals had been received for the Sterling Road CDBG Project, which had been delayed due to incorrect road measurements submitted with the initial grant application. After proper measurements were secured and additional grant funding received, the project is now ready for design. He recommended that West Consultants be selected as the engineer for the project.

Commissioner Herman asked who would be responsible for maintaining Sterling Road once the project was completed. Mr. Teague replied that all work would be in compliance with NCDOT standards in hopes that the road would be accepted into the State maintenance system.

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve West Consultants to serve as the engineer for the Sterling Road CDBG Project. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Teague also reported that the Paragon Films CDBG-ED rail spur had been installed and was now fully operational. As part of the grant, there will be required annual reporting related to job creation.

EMS BASE #1 FACILITY PROJECT BID AWARD RECOMMENDATION

Josh Mitchell, Public Works / Facilities Director, stated that a bid opening for the EMS Base #1 Facility Project was held on February 6, 2025 where 7 sealed bids were received. The lowest qualified bidder was David E. Looper & Company who submitted a base bid of \$795,000 for a 4,500 sqft. 5-bay climate-controlled garage, an alternate bid of \$1,431,000 for the garage and additional office/training space, and an add alternate of \$3,842 for garage door lights and safety sensors. The bid amount to complete the entire project totaled \$1,445,153 with an additional 5% recommended for construction contingency.

Mr. Mitchell reported that the new garage would house the QRV, one primary ambulance, and all backup units, which are currently parked under metal carports or are fully exposed to the elements. The office space will house administration, billing, the Training Officer, PORT Paramedic, and EMS Director.

Commissioner Herman made a motion to accept the low bid of \$1,445,153 for the EMS Base #1 Facility Project and award the contract to David E. Looper & Company. Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

BUDGET ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS #25 - #31 & PROJECT BUDGET ORDINANCE #P-3

Todd Herms, County Manager, reviewed the purpose of Budget Amendments #25 - #31 as well as Project Budget Ordinance #P-3 as follows:

Budget Amendment #25 – To increase:

- the Library budget for donations received and a revised allocation of State Aid funds.
- the Senior Center budget for a Senior Medicare Patrol Project grant from SHIP for fraud prevention activities and for a revised allocation of WPCOG General Purpose funding with required 25% local match.

Budget Amendment #26 – To budget for a true-up adjustment to pay out the June 30, 2024 fund balance amounts for the fire districts.

Budget Amendment #27 – To budget for estimated local funds that may be needed for construction observation services for the Industrial Park Sewer Project paid from the County Water & Sewer Fund.

Budget Amendment #28 – To:

- decrease the General Fund amount of ARPA revenue replacement funds being transferred to the ARPA Water Extension Project based on results of the February 11, 2025 bid opening.
- increase the General Fund amount of ARPA revenue replacement funds being transferred to the EMS Station #1 Facility Project based on results of the February 6, 2025 bid opening.
- increase the General Fund budget to transfer funds to the Sterling Road CDBG Project to pay the WPCOG contract fees for construction supervision services.

Budget Amendment #29 – To increase the EMS Station #1 Facility Project budget based on results of the February 6, 2025 bid opening; revenue source will be ARPA revenue replacement funds that aren't needed for the ARPA Water Extension Project due to lower than expected bids.

Budget Amendment #30 – To decrease the ARPA Water Extension Project budget based on results of the February 11, 2025 bid opening.

Budget Amendment #31 – To increase the Sterling Road CDBG Project budget for receipt of a second CDBG grant and for the transfer of local funds to cover the WPCOG contract fees for construction supervision services.

Project Budget Ordinance #P-3 – To budget for additional StRAP funds from the NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services in the amount of \$85,714 for stream debris cleanup.

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to approve Budget Amendments #25 - #31 and Project Budget Ordinance #P-3. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Tax Abatements & Adjustments (\$4,383.30) and Tax Refunds (\$919.25) for January 27 – March 2, 2025.
- B. Minutes from February 3, 2025 Regular Meeting and February 13, 2025 Budget Work Session.
- C. Line-Item Transfer Report for January and February 2025.
- D. Board / Committee Appointments – Equalization & Review Board and Farmland Preservation VAD Board.
- E. FY 2025 Audit Contract with Martin Starnes & Associates.
- F. Revised agreement with WPCOG for grant management assistance with the Sterling Road CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization Project.
- G. MOU with NC State Extension for Cost of Community Service Study.
- H. Amended Rules of Procedure for Alexander County Board of Commissioners.
- I. Amended Public Comment Procedures Policy.
- J. Soil & Water StRAP bid award and site contract with Shaun Lackey Excavating, LLC.
- K. Engineering agreement with McGill Associates, P.A. for Alexander County Lift Station No. 1 Upgrades.

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

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD ACTIVITIES

At 6:56 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 (Accreditation 37.6) – an engineer and ophthalmologist are still needed on the CHS Advisory Committee and staff vacancies include a School-Based Dental Coordinator (temporary grant position), Behavioral Health Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and Public Health Nurse II-CMARC.
 - FY2026 budget – staff attended a budget kick-off meeting on February 19, 2025 and FY2026 budget requests were submitted on Friday, March 7, 2025 as required.
 - Fee approvals (Accreditation 33.6) – due to increases in Medicaid / Medicare reimbursement rates, Ms. Walker requested a fee increase for COVID-19 testing from \$25 to \$50.

Commissioner Reese made a motion to approve the proposed fee increase effective March 11, 2025. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

- Board member orientation / annual training (Accreditation 34.1, 36.1, 36.2, 36.3) – Ms. Walker presented the annual CHS 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. Signatures were required on the CHSB Annual Review Acknowledgement Statement and BOCC Annual Review Guide.
- 2024 SOTCH report (Accreditation 1.2, 1.3) – Ms. Walker presented the 2024 State of the County Health Report (SOTCH) to the Board, which is created each year that the Community Health Assessment (CHA) isn't required. It is reviewed by the State and held to the standards/activities established for accreditation and provisions in the consolidated agreement. Ms. Walker reviewed the following 4 priorities and subsequent programs within each:
 1. Mental Health
 2. Substance Use Disorder
 3. Healthy Living
 4. Child Care / Parenting.

She advised that one previous priority (elder care) was discontinued and explained that the State felt 5 priorities were excessive. In addition, the Health Department works closely with the Senior Center to reach our aging population.

- CHIP update (Accreditation 1.3) – Ms. Walker presented information on the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and stated that the Health Department had received the acceptance letter. The CHIP showed no significant changes in morbidity and mortality. Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in Alexander County with cancer (specifically lung cancer) as the second leading cause. Ms. Walker stated that in 2022, Alexander County's suicide rate was higher than the state average.
- Strategic Plan (Accreditation 9.1, 15.1, 22.1) – Ms. Walker presented the Strategic Plan and explained that this plan coincided with the Community Health Assessment cycles and was developed with the management team. She also reported that the BOCC/CHSB was not required to approve the Strategic Plan but could make recommendations and/or changes if needed. Progress made on key priorities included:

Mental Health – mental health first aid classes and an ASIST suicide prevention course was offered free to the public.

Substance Use Disorder – SUD materials were presented to local churches, Detect & Reflect trailer was provided at local events for awareness, Narcan kits were given out in coordination with PORT, and risky behaviors training was continued at the local high school.

Healthy Living – the Health Educator assisted the Cooperative Extension Department with a Mediterranean Meals class in both English and Spanish. Childcare and parenting – the local interagency coordinating coalition presented Parents Rights in Education in Spanish and a crisis response team was formed under the Child Collaborative.

- CHA 2022-2025 (Accreditation 1.3, 19.1) – work is underway on the 2025 Community Health Assessment with online and paper surveys available to the public. The online survey is available at www.surveymonkey.com/r/9V735CL. As of today, a total of 694 valid survey responses have been recorded.
- DSS Report – Keri Jerrell, DSS Director, began by introducing several staff members in recognition of Social Worker Appreciation Month. There are currently 48 children in foster care with 10 in the Links Program and 4 in the 18-21 program. Ms. Jerrell reported that Alexander County’s rate of foster care entry was relatively low at 1.5 children per 1,000 for FY 2025 and that an information session for upcoming foster parent training was scheduled for March 17th at 5:30 PM at DSS. Other updates included key performance metrics for APS and Economic Services which are exceeding performance target goals. Two vacant Foster Care Social Worker positions have been filled; one is from another county agency and is already pre-certified.
- Senior Center Report – Vicki Martin, Assistant Senior Center Director, and Brianna Fox, Activity Assistant, presented information about the center’s many activities such as bingo and birthday lunches, tai chi and computer classes, and AARP tax preparation services. The cardio drumming class participated in the Christmas Parade, a blood drive was held in coordination with the Lee Masonic Lodge, a Valentine’s Day dance was hosted, and staff are currently providing assistance with Medicare Advantage open enrollment. Upcoming events include a document shredding event on March 21st, the Senior Celebration on May 16th, and a MedAssist event on May 30. Ms. Martin was happy to report that in 2024, staff made 1,364 contacts related to Medicare drug plans with a savings of \$1,537,840 for our citizens.

CLOSED SESSION – N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3, 5, & 6) ATTORNEY/CLIENT PRIVILEGE, CONTRACTUAL, & PERSONNEL

Vice-Chairman Yoder made a motion to enter into Closed Session at 7:34 PM to allow for attorney/client privilege and to discuss contractual matters and personnel issues pursuant to

N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(4, 5, & 6). Commissioner Reese seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Reese made a motion to adjourn at 8:25 PM. Commissioner Herman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Marty A. Pennell, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board