

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – December 8, 2025**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, December 8th, 2025, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

Members Present

Chairman, Tony Brown; Vice-Chair, Lynn Greene; Patrick Ellis, Trisha Garner, and David Walker

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board; Fred Coats, County Attorney; Terry Frank, Board of Education Chair; Dr. Tracy Grit, McDowell County Schools Superintendent; Lake Silver, 11th Congressional District Staff; Emily Quinlan, Director of Economic Revitalization, NC Division of Community Revitalization; John Burnette, Appalachian Archers

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. Commissioner Walker led the group in prayer. Vice-Chair Greene led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the November 10th and November 17th Regular Session Minutes, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the agenda with a request to move Mr. Silver's presentation up in the agenda due to a prior engagement on Mr. Silver's calendar. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Selection of Chair and Vice-Chair

The clerk to the board opened the floor for nominations to select the Chairman. Commissioner Walker made a motion that Tony Brown be Chairman, and was seconded by

Commissioner Garner. With no other nominations, the motion passed by 5-0 for Tony Brown to be Chairman.

The clerk to the board opened the floor for nominations to select the Vice-Chair. Commissioner Walker made a motion for Lynn Greene to be Vice-Chair, and it was seconded by Commissioner Garner. With no other nominations, the motion passed by 5-0 for Lynn Greene to be Vice-Chair.

NC School Board Association Award Presentation

Dr. Grit presented the NC School Board Association Award for County Commissioners of the Year to the Board. There are 115 school districts in North Carolina and the NCSBA selected one group of County Commissioners to receive this award. Dr. Grit along with members of the McDowell County School Board wrote letters of support for this nomination. Dr. Grit noted that one of the primary reasons they're able to receive this award is due to the cooperation between the two organizations.

The North Carolina School Boards Association (NCSBA) presented its County Commissioners of the Year Award to the McDowell County Board of Commissioners during the NCSBA Annual Conference held from November 12-14th. The County Commissioners of the Year Award is presented to a board of County Commissioners nominated by the local board of education in recognition of their extraordinary efforts. In nominating their County Commissioners, the McDowell County Board of Education cited their Commissioners' unwavering support as the school district persevered through a uniquely challenging school year in recovering from Hurricane Helene last fall. Through rebuilding efforts, the County leaders demonstrated ongoing partnership and a commitment to restoring successful learning outcomes for their students. In addition to their commitment to partnership through storm recovery, earlier this year when the school district faced a projected financial shortfall due to a change in state-level allocations, the Commissioners voted to increase their local allocation. This increase offset a majority of the shortfall, and is reflective of the County Commissioners' deep investment in seeing the students of their local school district succeed. These County leaders are recognized for having built a foundation of transparency, collaboration, and trust with their local school board, and NCSBA honors their commitment to leading with a vision to put a priority on public education.

Chairman of the McDowell County School Board, Terry Frank, presented the award to Chairman Brown. Chairman Brown stated that the board appreciates this County and the school system and they've always been and always will be pro-education.

Commissioner Ellis expressed thanks to the Board of Education and his excitement to continue to work together in the future. Vice-Chairman Greene stated that it's not hard to work together when you know who you're working with and what you're working together towards. Commissioner Garner stated that she looks forward to the things to come and serving the community jointly. Commissioner Walker congratulated Dr. Grit and the Board of Education on receiving the grant award for the new school and stated that he appreciated their ability to cooperate and work together for the community.

Ten Commandments to the Courthouse Lawn/County Buildings

Chairman Brown referenced the Virginia Statute drafted in 1786 by Thomas Jefferson and Championed by James Madison, and stated that this guaranteed individuals the right to worship as they choose. The First Amendment in 1791, officially part of the Bill of Rights, prohibits the federal government from making laws that establish a religion or prevent free exercise of religion. The 14th Amendment, ratified in 1868, interpreted by the Supreme Court, extended the religious protection of the First Amendment to the states as well. Chairman Brown stated that the nation was built on religion and religious freedom, and the original laws were written by men who believed in the laws of God. Chairman Brown stated that the laws of God were written in stone and gave us a roadmap to follow. Chairman Brown made a motion to put the Ten Commandments on the Courthouse lawn and in all County buildings. Commissioner Walker seconded this motion.

Commissioner Ellis expressed the need to keep the separation of church accurately and asked if Chairman Brown had discussed this with the County attorney. Mr. Brown said he did not.

Vice-Chair Greene read from the North Carolina Constitution (Article 1, Section 13), stating that all persons have a natural and inalienable right to worship almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences and no human authority shall, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience. Vice-Chair Greene stated that he is not against this, as a government entity, we need to keep church and state separate, and they need to look at the legalities of this matter and move with caution.

By a vote of 3-2, the motion passed with the following:

Ayes: Chairman Brown
Commissioner Garner
Commissioner Walker

Noes: Vice Chairman Greene
Commissioner Ellis

Vice-Chair Greene requested to add matters like this to the agenda moving forward.

11th Congressional District Update

Lake Silver gave the 11th Congressional District Update. Congressman Edwards was able to get 1.5 million dollars in the latest CR and this will be going to McDowell County's 911 Center.

Mr. Silver introduced Connor Brown to the board as he will be working with McDowell a lot more moving forward. Chairman Brown thanked Mr. Silvers and stated that he appreciated all the work he's done for the County.

Appalachian Archers Program Update

John Burnette presented the Appalachian Archers update and thanked the Commissioners for allowing him to speak. Mr. Burnette is the head coach for the Appalachian Archers Youth Team in McDowell County, providing youth archery for school-age kids. Appalachian Archers is a non-profit that has been in the County for around three years. Mr. Burnette thanked the McDowell County Commissioners for allowing them to use the County Gun Range for tournaments.

Mr. Burnette gave an overview of the tournaments and programs provided by Appalachian Archers and highlighted the success of the team. Last year, the team brought home two national titles, with four kids on the team who are national champions themselves. Children must count their own score, and this program teaches problem-solving and communication skills at a young age. They're currently working on a program with Hunter Education. Chairman Brown has been a supportive piece of this from the beginning, along with the McDowell County Gun Range, and Mr. Burnette presented an award to the board as a token of his gratitude for their support.

Chairman Brown expressed his appreciation for the nonprofit and all they do for the youth in the County. Commissioner Walker asked for suggestions or enhancements to facilities that could be made to help. Commissioner Walker asked if the three kids who won the National Championship could be recognized as well, and Chairman Brown requested that they return and an award be presented to them at a later date.

Renew NC Grant Opportunities

Emily Quinlan, with the Renew NC Grant Program from the NC Department of Commerce, presented on grant opportunities. Ms. Quinlan presented the eligibility criteria and application process.

The Renew NC Single-Family Housing Program is North Carolina's long-term disaster recovery effort to address remaining unmet owner-occupied, single-family disaster recovery needs in areas impacted by Hurricane Helene by providing housing and mobile home rehabilitation, reconstruction, replacement, or, in some cases, reimbursement. Applications are due December 31st, 2025. Visit any Renew NC Program Intake Center open Monday through Saturday from 8 AM to 6 PM to apply. McDowell's Renew NC Intake Center is located at 364 US Highway 70, Suite 3, Marion, NC 28752. A full list of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers can be found at renewnc.org/resources/

Eligibility Criteria:

- The applicant must have owned the damaged property at the time of Hurricane Helene, September 27, 2024, and must still own the property.
- The applicant must have occupied the home as a primary residence at the time of Hurricane Helene, September 27, 2024.
- The property must have been damaged as a result of Hurricane Helene.
- The property must be an eligible structure type.
- The applicant must be current on their property taxes or on a payment plan in good standing.
- If there is a mortgage on the property, the mortgage must be in good standing.
- The applicant's household must qualify as low-to-moderate income, with a combined annual household income of no more than 120% of the Area Median Income, adjusted for family size.

Vice-Chairman Greene asked if these funds were separate from FEMA funding and Ms. Quinlin said they're separate. Ms. Quinlin stated that she was happy to take suggestions on spreading the word about this grant opportunity to residents of the County.

Presentation of Gifts from Mayor Steve Little

Mayor Steve Little presented his annual calendar and two books he'd written. Chairman Brown thanked Mayor Little.

Request to Add Closed Session to the Agenda

Before proceeding to the next item, Mr. Wooten asked if a closed session could be added to the end of the meeting to discuss personnel matters.

Water System Project Updates and Approvals

Mr. Wooten presented the Water System updates. East End has started, with phase two A and B winding down. The County is working with city staff to transition some existing city customers over to the County. Bids for phase three (Randolph Road) have opened on Thursday prior, and Mr. Wooten expects to have the certified bid tab from the engineer by next week. There was a good turnout for the bid, with the lowest being around \$1.3 million. This work would start after the New Year and wrap up by the end of the summer.

The Providence (West Marion Elementary) project has ninety percent plans for review. Staff have met with city staff recently to better understand the water supply that they have available. The city is asking for assistance and advocacy to help complete some important studies regarding this. It's important to understand the city's water supply, so they know how much water is available for the City to sell to the County.

The Nebo system's Asset, Inventory, and Assessment is being done. A small grant has been received that will pay for facilitative meetings in January with the city and the town. These meetings will focus on how to work together, specifically regarding disaster response. Mr. Wooten stated that no action needed to be taken at this time.

Broadband Expansion Update

Mr. Wooten presented the data provided in the packet received by Ms. Montgomery from the NC Rural Center in Asheville. The GREAT (Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology) program is a Federal-State-County-Private partnership, as is CAB (Completing Access to Broadband). The BEAD (Broadband Equity Access Development) program is a Federal-State-Private partnership program. Another program is called RDOF (Rural Digital Opportunity Fund).

The anticipated sites served for the various programs are listed below:

GREAT - 913

CAB - 1,351

RDOF - 2,731

BEAD - 1,337

The first three programs should be complete by the end of 2026, while the BEAD completion date is likely in 2027. The state has taken a strong lead on this program to ensure that North Carolina is leading and competing with broadband.

Commissioner Committee Appointments

The Clerk to the Board presented two applications for the Agriculture Advisory Board. Both Nathan Geisler and Alvin Lytle have reapplied due to their term limit expiring. Vice-Chair Greene moved to waive the second reading and approve the applicants as presented, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a motion of 5-0, the motion passed.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Update and Approval

Mr. Wooten presented the Budget Update, with no amendments, along with the tax collection report.

Administrative Items for Review and Approval

Mr. Wooten presented two action items: EMS Write-offs and Nebo Water Leak Adjustments. The Finance Department has asked for the write-off of the non-collectible EMS bills in the attachment that total \$49,165.17. The Water Department has requested leak waivers of \$184.32, \$597.67, \$34.28, \$400.00, \$34.53, \$323.17, \$114.44, \$155, and \$87.57.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the EMS write-offs and Nebo water leak waivers as presented, with a second by vice-chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Property Tax Releases, Refunds, and Discoveries

Mr. Wooten presented the property tax releases, refunds, and discoveries.

Releases Over \$100: \$105.13

Releases Under \$100: \$4,651.28

Motor Vehicle Refunds: \$1,189.19

Discoveries: \$45,599.22

Vice-chair Greene made a motion to approve the releases, refunds, and discoveries as presented, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Approval of 2026 Meeting Schedule

Mr. Wooten presented the 2026 meeting schedule for approval.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the schedule as presented, seconded by Vice-chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Citizen Comment

None

Commissioner and Staff Reports:

Commissioner Walker read the Christmas Story, and the board gave their Christmas greetings.

Closed Session [NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (6)]

Commissioner Walker made a motion to go into closed session at 6:22 pm, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to come out of closed session at 7:34 pm, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Ten Commandments to the Courthouse Lawn/County Buildings

Chairman Brown made a motion to table the discussion on the Ten Commandments until the County attorney can review its legality and the board can vote with knowledge. Commissioner Walker seconded this motion. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 7:35 p.m., with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Madalyn Robinson
Clerk to the Board

Tony Brown
Chairman