

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – January 12, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, January 12th, 2026, 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; Dr. J.W. Kelley, MTCC President; Aikman Kazee, Parks and Recreation Director; Nicholas Larson, USFS Grandfather District Ranger; Anthony Starr, WPCOG Executive Director

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the December 8th and December 15th 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. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

McDowell Tech Partnership Opportunities

Dr. J.W. Kelley, MTCC President, discussed two potential partnership opportunities with the County. Mr. Wooten prefaced the discussion by adding that the County has been working with MTCC for many years and has had recent discussions on improving the firing range and adding enhancements for their Public Safety and Law Enforcement Programs.

Public Safety Training Complex:

Several years ago, the County agreed in principle to allow underutilized land near the old landfill to be used for public safety training. This additional development would supplement the existing firing range that has been used by public safety agencies. This effort has new momentum with current proposals involving upgrading the firing range as well as adding infrastructure for fire training purposes. In order to proceed, MTCC has requested that a 20-year lease be developed between the County and MTCC for these areas.

Dr. Kelley explained that Sheriff Buchanan has reached out to him about the firing range and the need for improvements. Representative Dudley Green had worked with the County and the school to allocate money from the state to assist with public safety training. With that money, MTCC hired an agency to develop a plan for the firing range and fire safety training in the location mentioned previously. After contacting the general assembly representative, Dr. Kelley was informed that the \$950,000 can be used for anything that will benefit the County that falls under the broad definition of public safety training. After conversations with Sheriff Buchanan, Dr. Kelley reached out to the Fire Safety Commission and reviewed the original plan from 2020. Dr. Kelley has had preliminary conversations with the McDowell Tech Board of Trustees to confirm they'd support further conversations with the Sheriff's Department, Fire Safety Commission, and McDowell County. They're looking into expanding the firing range to meet law enforcement needs, adding bathrooms, improving the classroom area, and working with the fire association in hopes of adding a burn house.

To use the state-money they'd need to enter into a long-term lease of 20 years. Dr. Kelley, representing MTCC, requested that the County and MTCC begin negotiating a 20-year lease for these areas. Commissioner Walker made a motion to begin the process as requested and work with the County attorney on the creation of a 20-year lease with MTCC to be brought back to the board for approval. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Baldwin Avenue Building :

The second item involves the Ford Miller Building on Baldwin Avenue in Marion. This building was donated to MTCC about 20 years ago for the purposes of consolidating job training and employment offices. Since that time, the facility utilization has changed to where it seemingly no longer makes sense to keep the functions in the building. NC Works has made plans to relocate elsewhere in Marion, and MTCC has proposed shifting its employees and programs to the main campus, which would make the building available for other uses. MTCC has suggested that the building could be leased to the County for \$1 year and be available for County functions. It is the County staff's recommendation that the building be used for Cooperative Extension and Soil & Water since both of those departments collaborate and serve similar constituencies. Their freed-up space could allow for consolidation of other County functions and could create opportunities for lease income for other County-owned buildings.

Mr. Wooten explained that the County is looking at other County entities that would fit in the building and better serve the community, such as Cooperative Extension and the Soil and Water Office. Assuming those two departments relocate to Baldwin Avenue, this would free up space in the Services Building for other County Departments to consolidate. Mr. Wooten and Dr.

Kelley are asking for the Board's consent to work on a no-cost lease if MTCC's Board of Trustees is agreeable to this. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the request to work on a no-cost lease and be brought back to the board, seconded by Vice-chairman Greene. By a motion of 5-0, the motion passed.

Youth League Agreement Renewals

Parks and Recreation Director Aikman Kazee presented the Youth League Agreement Renewals. Mr. Kazee presented two memoranda of understanding.

The first to be presented was McDowell County Little League, which merged with McDowell County in 2022 and has quickly become one of the largest leagues in this district. Updates to this memorandum include clearly outlined responsibilities and express in writing that McDowell County Little League will give McDowell County access to all the league's documentation, including financial statements. The MOU also removes items for partners who are no longer associated with the Little League Board. Mr. Kazee stated there is potential for a change of charter to Babe Ruth from Little League. If this charter does change, the makeup and operations of the league would remain the same. This possible change would prioritize affordability for the children in the County to participate in Little League.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to enter into the agreement with the Little League of McDowell or McDowell County and Babe Ruth, whichever the Parks and Recreation Board of Directors chooses, seconded by Commissioner Garner. Vice-Chair Greene added that he'd like to include a timeframe in the wording for item #8 (all money collected from games be surrendered to the Parks and Recreation Department) in the MOU. Commissioner Walker amended the motion to include the wording addition request from Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

The second MOU to be presented was for McDowell County Youth Football League. Upon revising the Little League MOU, Mr. Kazee found that there was no MOU for the Youth Football League. The McDowell County Youth Football League has experienced growth each year since 2021. Similar to the MOU for Little League, the Youth Football League MOU outlines responsibilities for both Parks and Recreation and the MCYFL Board. This will also signal a shift for MCYFL to be able to handle the entire registration process. Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve the MOU for McDowell County Youth Football League, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

US Forest Service Update

Grandfather Ranger District Ranger Nicholas Larson presented an update on activities within the Pisgah National Forest.

Mr. Larson stated that across the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forest open road system, roughly 48 bridges were damaged or destroyed by Helene. They continue to work and catalog damage from the closed roads. 885 miles of road have been damaged and about 30% of that road damage is expected to be complete reconstruction. 850 miles of trail has been damaged and the actual forest itself has about 190,000 acres of forest, timber, and trees have been damaged. As of now, 93% of open roads and trails are reopened, with some being open

repairs that will continue to see larger culverts, bridge replacements, and trails stabilized. All open roads that they've been able to access across the Grandfather Ranger District (approximately 150 miles) have received six inches of fresh gravel, ditches pulled, roads graded, and culverts dug.

Mr. Larson moved on to progress on bridges and explained that they're almost done with Jarett's Creek Bridge and anticipate it reopening within the next two weeks. After completion of this bridge, they'll be able to move to repairs on the Gateway Trail. They plan to continue repairs on three to four bridges each year until they're caught up. All the trailheads at Linville Gorge have new gravel, brush removed, and rails to identify the trailheads. They're working with the National Park Service to provide alternative access to Linville Falls and they'll continue that partnership for the next three to four years until the final construction on the National Park Service side can be completed. A contract started two weeks prior to get Curtis Creek back up and operational and they're on target for Curtis Creek to be reopened in April.

Mr. Larson suspects that for the next four to five years, they'll have some form of debris removal around their road systems and fire lines to reduce wildfire risks. Mr. Larson informed the board of the large agreements in place with many of their conservation partners. They're focusing on stream surveys to monitor the fish habitat and stabilization of rivers and streams as well as wildfire response. A lot of folks are coming together to help get the forest back in place after Helene.

The board thanked Mr. Larson for the updates.

Charlotte Interbasin Transfer Update

Western Piedmont Council of Governments Executive Director Anthony Starr will give an update on what his organization has been doing in response to the pending Charlotte Interbasin Transfer proposal.

Mr. Starr began by explaining what Interbasin Transfers (IBTs) are. Charlotte has existing approval for an interbasin transfer of 33 million gallons per day (mgd). This IBT was originally projected to meet demands until 2030. In 2024, Charlotte announced its intent to request an increase of 30 million gpd, bringing the total transfer to 63 mgd. The 30 mgd IBT increase will serve about 300,000 more people in eastern Mecklenburg. Charlotte Water's request has economic, financial, and legal consequences for communities that rely exclusively on the Catawba River Basin for their water needs.

Mr. Starr explained that Charlotte's request would harm basin communities economically and benefit Charlotte. WNC needs water capacity for commercial and industrial growth, but that growth can't happen if WNC's only water source is transferred to Charlotte. WNC cannot accommodate its own residential growth if its water is used to accommodate Charlotte's instead.

The interbasin transfer means cheaper water for Charlotte and more expensive water for Catawba River basin communities. Charlotte has other options to minimize harm to Catawba River basin communities, including taking water from the Yadkin River basin or returning water back to the Catawba River basin. Mr. Starr stated that WPCOG is not opposed to Charlotte growing; they just do not want that growth to occur at our region's expense. Mr. Starr highlighted that IBTs could make the impacts of severe droughts worse for other communities along the Catawba River and the limited resources of the Catawba River should not be used to subsidize

huge growth outside the river basin. Mr. Starr explained the July 2025 H. 850, Interbasin Transfer Moratorium/Study and discussed WPCOG's priority requests for the study, along with what coalition members can do to help.

Commissioner Ellis asked if the other Counties in the coalition are fighting the IBT request, and Mr. Starr stated the Counties in North Carolina (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, and McDowell) were. Mr. Starr recommended continuing to mention this to legislators and raising awareness on this issue. The moratorium will stay in place until March of 2027, and the study will be complete in January 2027. The board thanked Mr. Starr for his presentation.

Water System Project Updates and Approvals

Mr. Wooten presented the Water System Updates and approvals.

Nebo:

- The East End Project began on August 4. This project is scheduled to be completed in April 2026.
- Nebo Phases 2 A & B are under construction. Several sections have been placed into service. The completion date is by mid-October.
- The small extension project near Exit 90 is ready to bid, with one more procedural hurdle (the environmental review) needing to be completed. There is no scheduled start or end date at this time.
- The design for Phase 3 has been approved by NCDEQ. The bids were opened on December 4. A certified bid tabulation and award documents, including a resolution, are for the board's review and approval.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to include the phase 3 bids, include them in the minutes, approve the resolutions, and approve the low bid to Hyatt Pipeline at \$1,338,550, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passes.

RESOLUTION OF TENTATIVE AWARD

WHEREAS, McDowell County, North Carolina has received bids, pursuant to duly advertisement notice therefore, for construction of the Nebo Water System Expansion Phase (SRP-D-ARP-0027), and

WHEREAS, McGill Associates, PA, the Town's Consulting Engineers have reviewed the bids; and

WHEREAS, Hyatt Pipeline, LLC was the lowest bidder for the Nebo Water System Expansion Phase 3 construction contract, in the total bid amount of \$1,338,550.00, and

WHEREAS, the consulting Engineers recommend TENTATIVE AWARD to the lowest bidder(s).

NOW, THERE FORE, BE IT RESOLVED that TENTATIVE AWARD is made to the lowest bidder,

Hyatt Pipeline, LLC in the Total Bid Amount of \$1,338,550.00.

Name of Contractor Amount

1. Hyatt Pipeline, LCC \$1,338,550.00
2. Appalachian Sitework, Inc. \$1,353,863.90
3. Ledford and Parker, Inc. \$1,406,100.00
4. Two Brothers Utilities, LLC \$1,447,906.00
5. TEPBD OPCO, LLC \$1,535,426.64
6. T.P. Howard's Plumbing Co., Inc. \$1,690,000.00
7. Father and Son Enterprises, LLC \$1,800,000.00
8. Birdsall Excavation and Construction, LLC \$2,899,850.00

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that such TENTATIVE AWARD be contingent upon the approval of the

North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality – Division of Water Infrastructure.

Upon motion of _____, seconded by _____, the above

RESOLUTION was unanimously adopted. This is ___ day of January 2026.

Providence Area/West Marion Elementary Area:

- The engineer has provided the 90% plans to staff for review.
- Additional funds have been applied for under the State Revolving Fund program through NC DEQ Division of Water Infrastructure. That application was in the amount of \$3,538,500. The applications will be voted on by the State Water Infrastructure Authority at their February 2026 meeting.
- The City of Marion has indicated that they have concerns with their water supply capacity and has asked that the County assist them in securing funds to study their water supply before an agreement to serve this area is finalized. Funding sources are being evaluated at this time. Staff believes that this issue will not affect the project at this time due to the ongoing environmental review, which will not be complete until the March timeframe.

Mr. Wooten explained that the Asset Inventory and Assessment Project for the County is underway (primarily for Nebo System). The first steps involve doing a complete inventory of the County's water assets and updating the mapping. A kickoff meeting has been held with the engineer. They should have some of their initial work completed within the next few months. NCDEQ has provided the County \$100,000 to develop post-Helene partnerships with Marion, Old Fort, and the County. A kickoff meeting will be held in January with the City and Town.

Vice-Chair Greene asked where they stood on funding for completion to the elementary school for the West Marion project. Mr. Wooten explained that the engineers believe they have enough funding from the state appropriation, Appalachian Regional Commission, and the school system to get to the school. Next month will have the environmental documents and will be

ready to move towards bidding. On February 9th, they will have more information about the grant application for the loop extension. Commissioner Ellis asked staff to remember businesses in the Nebo area regarding the AIA and Marion Water Supply capacity.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to receive the grant and approve the resolution, seconded by Commissioner Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passes.

RESOLUTION BY GOVERNING BODY OF RECIPIENT

WHEREAS, the North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 159G has created Viable Utility Reserve Grants to assist eligible units of government with meeting their water infrastructure needs, and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality has offered a Viable Utility Reserve Grant in the amount of \$400,000 to perform an Asset Inventory and Assessment and Rate Study detailed in the submitted application, and

WHEREAS, McDowell County intends to perform said project in accordance with the agreed scope of work,

***NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF
McDOWELL COUNTY:***

That McDowell County does hereby accept the Viable Utility Reserve Grant offer of \$400,000.

That McDowell County does hereby give assurance to the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality that any Conditions or Assurances contained in the Award Offer will be adhered to.

That Ashley R. Wooten, County Manager and successors so titled, are hereby authorized and directed to furnish such information as the appropriate State agency may request in connection with this project to make the assurances as contained above; and to execute such other documents as may be required by the Division of Water Infrastructure.

Adopted this the 12th of January, 2026 at Marion, North Carolina

Opioid Settlement Funding Availability

The County joined a multi-jurisdictional lawsuit for companies that participated in the Opioid epidemic. The County has been part of litigation for 7-8 years, and in the settlement stage for 3-4 years. The board previously approved a memorandum of agreement with the NC Department of Justice and the entities that were being sued. To receive the funds, the County needed to participate in the agreement and agree to spend settlement funds on purposes primarily oriented towards addiction treatment. Agencies associated with this project in McDowell have done their best to report and make an impact on the community. There is currently a one-year performance period, and staff recommends the option for agencies move to three-year performance reviews based on agency performance. Doing this would give the agencies involved opportunities to demonstrate their ability to help.

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to allow staff to approve the three-year performance review based on their performance, seconded by Commissioner Walker. Commissioner Ellis asked if this would be specified in the budget recommendation. Mr. Wooten stated that it would and they want to make sure internal agencies have the first shot at funding as long as the program meets the criteria of the MOA. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

New County Policy Proposals

Mr. Wooten presented the policy regarding the one-cent coin shortage and the discontinuance of in-person cash transactions. The purpose of this policy is to establish a uniform procedure for handling in-person cash transactions in light of the discontinuance of the minting of the penny and the resulting unavailability of exact change. This policy applies to all McDowell County departments, offices, and agencies that accept in-person cash payments. The memo provided to the board includes an outline of what can be done in case of non-exact in-person payment. Mr. Wooten added that this is a draft policy for review, and no action is needed tonight because it's a first reading.

Mr. Wooten presented the employee service recognition policy. This policy establishes a consistent and equitable method for recognizing employees at designated service milestones. Eligible employees may choose between receiving the service pin or the monetary compensation. Mr. Wooten stated that this is a draft policy for review, and no action is needed tonight because it's a first reading. Commissioner Walker asked for language based on staff recommendation to address the use of sick time for retirement regarding the pin option, so employees and staff will be aware. Mr. Wooten will bring back the revision for next month's meeting.

Commissioner Meeting Video Recording Policy

Mr. Wooten presented the Commissioner Meeting Video Recording Policy. Staff recommends a change to the current policy by adding the third Monday meeting to be recorded along with the regular monthly meeting. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the recommended policy change presented by staff, seconded by Vice-Chairman Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Ordinance Codification Proposal

Mr. Wooten presented the Ordinance Codification Proposal for approval. The codification process would help to ensure our ordinances are kept up to date with state statutes and would also improve their understanding and enforceability with law enforcement. Staff have been looking at proposals for some years now. If authorized, all ordinances that are adopted and enforceable would be provided to the Municode company, and their contract attorney would work with the County attorney and staff to ensure everything is up to date. All ordinances would be compiled into one document similar to the City of Marion's ordinance structure. Staff has budgeted funding for this project and money has been set aside.

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve the proposal for ordinance codification, seconded by Commissioner Garner, by a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Committee Appointments

Mr. Wooten presented a Commissioner appointment request from the City of Marion. The City of Marion has asked that a Commissioner (along with the County Manager) participate in a roundtable/committee regarding homelessness. The meetings would be held once a month at a date and time to be determined. Commissioner Garner volunteered to be the commissioner designee for the board. Commissioner Walker made a motion to appoint Commissioner Garner to the board, with a second from Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Update and Approvals

Mr. Wooten presented the budget updates. The property tax collection rate is 78.15% through December. There is one Project Closeout for School Projects as well as budget amendments:

- GF 19 - Allocates program revenue for Cooperative Extension.
- GF 20 - Transfers between line items in Elections.
- GF 21 - Transfers between line items in Emergency Services.
- GF 22 - Transfers between line items in the Human Resources department.
- GF 23 - Transfers between line items in the Animal Services budget.
- GF 24 - Transfers funds between line items in the Sheriff's Office.
- GF 25 - Allocates funding loan funding for an interest free loan for the Nebo FD.
- GF 26 - Allocates revenue for the Interbasin Transfer effort.
- GF 27 - Allocates program revenue and transfers between line items in the Parks and Rec budget.
- GF 28 - Allocates the MEE grant revenue in the Transit budget.
- GF 29 - Transfers between line items in the Senior Center budget.
- GF 30 - Transfers between line items in the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council budget.
- GF 31 - Allocates prior year reserved funds in the DSS budget.
- ENT2 - Transfers between line items in the waste enterprise fund

RESOLUTION

CLOSE-OUT OF PROJECT FUND

WHEREAS, the County of McDowell began a project fund (46), and

WHEREAS, the County used restricted sales tax in the amount of \$6,685,948, Needs Based Lottery Funds of \$15,000,000 and Loan Proceeds of \$5,000,000 to finance the school project fund, and

WHEREAS, the County desires to close certain school projects within the school project fund, and

WHEREAS, final payments have been made, and the projects the County will close are as follows:

Old Fort Elementary \$20,500,000

High School Stadium Lights \$219,150

West Marion Septic \$463,550

Marion Grading \$209,867

Paving Gw, Nebo \$1,877,855

High School Concrete \$211,615

MHS Tennis Court \$2,719,706

Marion Roofing \$423,500

MHS Gym and Locker \$60,705

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNTY OF McDOWELL BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS THAT the County of McDowell School Project Funds listed above are complete and all documentation will be preserved in County files to comply with recordkeeping requirements.

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

Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Planning

Mr. Wooten presented the draft budget preparation calendar for FY 2027. Mr. Wooten asked the board if they'd like to deviate from the calendar presented or add any special budget workshops. Mr. Wooten stated they did not need to take action tonight if the board would like to think about additions and revisions to the calendar presented.

Transportation Project Updates

Mr. Wooten provided some quick updates on transportation projects, including the widening of 226 South near the Love's Truck Stop. Mr. Wooten provided a list of projects in development from NCDOT to the board. Mr. Wooten spoke with the District Engineer, and they've been working on improving traffic light timing in that area. Mr. Wooten added that the construction-oriented project costs have outpaced the revenues available to DOT. DOT has been battling a lack of funds before Helene, and this has been an ongoing struggle.

Administrative Items for Review and Approval

Mr. Wooten had several administrative items to present, including the senior center building lease, EMS write-offs, Nebo water leak waiver, and faxing fee waiver.

The current tenant in Suite 2 (New Beginnings Alliance LLC) in the lower level of the Senior Center has expressed interest in leasing Suite 1. The proposed lease rate is the same (\$5,500 per month). A resolution and lease agreement for New Beginnings Alliance LLC was presented to the board for approval. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the lease and resolution as presented, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 5-0, passed.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTION OF A LEASE AGREEMENT

FOR MCDOWELL COUNTY PROPERTY TO NEW BEGINNINGS ALLIANCE, LLC

WHEREAS, McDowell County (the "County") is the owner of the real property located at 100 Spaulding Road, Suite 1, Marion, McDowell County, North Carolina 28752 (the "Property"); and

WHEREAS, New Beginnings Alliance, LLC (the "Lessee"), a private not-for-profit agency serving North Carolina, has requested a Lease Agreement for approximately 6,667 square feet of office space at the Property for the purpose of providing mental health services; and

WHEREAS, the proposed lease term shall commence on February 1, 2026, and terminate on June 30, 2026, with an annual lease payment of \$66,000.00, payable in monthly installments of \$5,500.00 to the McDowell County Finance Department; and

WHEREAS, the County has no immediate use for this property during the proposed lease term and recognizes the benefit of making the space available for the provision of mental health services to County residents; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 160A-272, a County may lease property upon such terms and conditions as it deems wise; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners is of the opinion that it is in the best interests of the citizens and residents of McDowell County to approve this Lease Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners for the County of McDowell as follows:

- 1. The recitals set forth above are incorporated herein by reference as if fully restated.*
- 2. The Chair of the Board of Commissioners is hereby authorized to execute the Lease Agreement with New Beginnings Alliance, LLC, together with any related documents necessary to carry out the intent of this Resolution, and the Clerk to the Board is authorized to attest to any documents executed in the name of the County.*
- 3. All acts and doings of officers, employees, and agents of the County, taken prior to, on, or after the adoption of this Resolution, which are in conformity with and in*

furtherance of the purposes of this Resolution, are hereby ratified, approved, and confirmed.

4. This Resolution shall become effective upon its adoption.

Mr. Wooten presented the EMS write-offs and the Nebo Water Leak Waivers for December 2025. The Finance Department has asked for the write-off of the non-collectible EMS bills in the attachment that total \$34,434.09. There are Nebo Water leak waivers for \$28, \$100, \$43, and \$44.59. Mr. Wooten presented the Faxing Fee Waiver Request from Library Director, Marlan Brinkley, for approval from the board. Mr. Brinkley requested approval to waive faxing fees for documents directly related to Hurricane Helene recovery, including FEMA paperwork. Waiving these fees would help remove barriers to accessing recovery assistance.

Vice-Chair Greene motioned to approve administrative items as presented, seconded by Commissioner Walker. 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 for approval.

Releases Over \$100: \$3,609.81

Releases Under \$100: \$65.73

Motor Vehicle Refunds: \$1,385.21

Discoveries: \$647.93

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

Looking Ahead to 2026

Mr. Wooten presented the projects and goals for 2026. In 2026, McDowell County will continue working to enhance the quality of life for all residents through focused recovery efforts, strategic investments, and collaborative planning initiatives.

Hurricane Helene Recovery:

Recovery from Hurricane Helene will remain a major priority throughout 2026. Much of the County government's focus will be on securing state and federal recovery funding to support housing rehabilitation and the repair and replacement of public infrastructure. County staff will continue working closely with volunteer organizations and state agencies to ensure Helene-impacted households receive the assistance needed to rebuild and recover. In addition, planning and construction will move forward on multiple stream restoration projects across the County, utilizing a combination of state and federal funding sources. County staff and engineering partners will develop restoration plans and initiate work at Greenlee Park, Lindley Park, and Sandy Andrews Park.

Education:

The County will continue its partnership with McDowell County Schools during the early planning stages for a new elementary school to be built on the east side of Marion. Additional planning efforts will also address immediate and long-term school facility needs to ensure the County's educational infrastructure keeps pace with future growth.

Community and Economic Development:

Several ongoing economic development initiatives are expected to gain momentum in 2026. Developers of the Main Street hotel project in Marion have indicated construction will begin in earnest during the first quarter of the year. A second industrial and warehouse site at Universal Technology Park will be prepared for completion in 2026. The County will continue working with partners and Givens Estates to secure remaining funding for the proposed senior apartment community at the former Clinchfield textile plant.

Infrastructure:

Approximately \$15 million in water line investments will be completed in the Nebo area, more than doubling the County's water service footprint. Several broadband expansion projects are expected to be completed in 2026.

County Facility Improvements:

Funding opportunities will be explored for replacement facilities for the 911 Communications Center and the Animal Shelter. Improvements to County parks will continue at all ballfield complexes and the Recreation Center in downtown Marion.

Chairman Brown asked for an update on the animal shelter. Mr. Wooten explained that they're looking for a combination of funding and a combination site on Spaulding Road for the 911 Center and Animal Shelter using CDBG funds.

Citizen Comment

Rhonda Cook on Gentiva Hospice and Carl R. Becker on the Sugar Hill Convenience Center.

Adjournment

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 6:46 p.m., with a second by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

Madalyn Robinson
Clerk to the Board

Tony Brown
Chairman