

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – February 16, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, February 16th, 2026, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

Members Present

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

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board; Sarah Brewer, Human Services Director; Ricky Buchanan, McDowell County Sheriff; Alan Thompson, Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams, and Co.

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 11:30 am. Chairman Greene led the group in prayer. Commissioner Garner led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

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

Recognition of Sheriff's Office Staff

Sheriff Ricky Buchanan recognized members of the Community Impact Team and gave information regarding Operation Winter Freeze, which took place from early November through January. This targeted initiative was designed to disrupt illegal drug activity in McDowell County and resulted in significant seizures and multiple arrests. Several years ago, Sheriff Buchanan and Chief Deputy Mace approached the Board of Commissioners about creating the Community Impact Team. The team would focus on the areas throughout the County that experience high-call volumes. Sheriff Buchanan was extremely selective in the process of choosing members to serve on this team and expressed his appreciation and gratitude for what those detectives continue to do. During Operation Winter-Freeze, the McDowell County Sheriff's Department had 32 drug-related arrests, three firearm-related arrests, and 22 individuals charged. Sheriff Buchanan noted that this is a direct reflection of the hard work and dedication put in by the detectives and supervisors involved.

Chairman Brown requested a special letter of recognition for each member of the impact team. The Board of Commissioners thanked the detectives, supervisors, and Sheriff Buchanan for their hard work and dedication to keeping McDowell County safe.

Human Services Update

Human Services Director Sarah Brewer gave the monthly operational update. Mrs. Brewer followed up on foster care and rates for children in group foster care. Mrs. Brewer reached out to Ebenezer Children's Ministries about placing children in McDowell County. Ebenezer Children's Ministry has offered a three percent discount to the County for every child placed. This would benefit children because they will stay in McDowell County, giving them better access to visits with parents and loved ones. Mrs. Brewer discussed their goal to increase foster parents in McDowell and added that eight families are currently enrolled in the foster care class. Mrs. Brewer and her staff continue to work on recruitment plans to increase foster parents and will provide an update on that in the spring.

Mrs. Brewer began discussing items that will affect economic services. HR1 changes will significantly impact McDowell County in October 2026. The reimbursement rate for food nutrition determination administration will decrease from 50% down to 25%. Finance estimates that McDowell County will be impacted by \$249,000 with these changes in food nutrition by 2027. In addition, there will be changes in Medicaid by 2027. Approximately 3,900 residents in McDowell receive expanded Medicaid. With the HR1 changes, that group will be required to show the agency proof that they're seeking employment. They will need to demonstrate that they've applied for a certain number of jobs or prove community engagement efforts if not seeking active employment within a six-month time frame. This new requirement will impact workloads for staff. Staff will be required to verify Medicaid every 6 months, check employment, and verify citizenship. The recertification of Medicaid will substantially increase the workload and impact the economic services division. Mrs. Brewer is actively seeking information on HR1 and the changes that will take place, and continues to work with the Finance Department and Mr. Wooten on preparing for these changes. They're currently down seven positions in the Economic Services Department, and Mrs. Brewer's goal is to make sure the positions are filled by October to prepare for these changes. Mrs. Brewer noted that there could be a need for more positions in the Economic Services Department as a result of HR1. The board thanked Mrs. Brewer for her presentation.

FY 2025 Independent Auditor's Presentation

Alan Thompson of the County's independent auditor, Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams, and Co. presented the FY 2025 audit. A copy of the audit report was provided to the Board. Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams, and Co. independent audit firm, was hired to issue an opinion on the financial statements and provide an unmodified report to the County. Mr. Thompson stated that the County is in good standing as far as risk (management override of controls and improper revenue recognition). Significant accounting estimates were evaluated, and the firm found no issues. Financial statement disclosures were neutral, consistent, and clear with no issues. Mr. Thompson reported no difficulties in performing the audit, no uncorrected misstatements, and no disagreements with management. Management provided a representation letter dated January 20th. Mr. Thompson reported that there were no items of concern noted in their independent review. The auditor reviewed the fund balance as a percentage of General Fund expenditures. The percentage of fund balance available increased from 32.09% to 36.52%. Mr. Thompson noted the positive trend in the general fund balance,

going from 16 million in 2021 to 34 million in 2025. Mr. Thompson stated the collection rate on property taxes is 99.55%. Total debt has decreased from \$25 million to 21 million, indicating good financial strength for the County. The collection percentage has stayed above 95% for over five years. Public safety, human resources, and education were the County's top expenditures. The board thanked Mr. Thompson for his presentation and Ms. Bell for her hard work.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the 2025 audit report as presented, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Toe River Hazard Mitigation Plan Update Approval

Mr. Wooten presented the Toe River Hazard Mitigation Plan required by FEMA and the state. For several years, McDowell County has jointly developed a regional hazard mitigation plan with Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties. The plan is up for an update and each local government has been asked to approve of the updates to the plan. Mr. Wooten, Mr. Kehler, and Mr. Presley have reviewed this plan, and all believe this plan is an improvement over the current plan.

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve the mitigation plan update with a second from Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

RESOLUTION

ADOPTING THE TOE RIVER REGIONAL HAZARD MITIGATION PLAN

WHEREAS, the citizens and property within McDowell County are subject to the effects of natural hazards that pose threats to lives and cause damage to property, and with the knowledge and experience that certain areas of the county are particularly vulnerable to drought, extreme heat, hailstorm, hurricane and tropical storm, lightning, thunderstorm wind/high wind, tornado, winter storm and freeze, flood, hazardous material incident, and wildfire; and

WHEREAS, McDowell County desires to seek ways to mitigate the impact of identified hazard risks; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature of the State of North Carolina has in Article 5, Section 160D-501 of Chapter 160D of the North Carolina General Statutes, delegated to local governmental units the responsibility to adopt regulations designed to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare of its citizenry; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature of the State of North Carolina has enacted General Statute Section 166A-19.41 (State emergency assistance funds) which provides that for a state of emergency declared pursuant to G.S. 166A-19.20(a) after the deadline established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the eligible entity shall have a hazard mitigation plan approved pursuant to the Stafford Act; and

WHEREAS, Section 322 of the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, as amended, states that local governments must develop an All-Hazards Mitigation Plan in

order to be eligible to receive future Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Funds and other disaster-related assistance funding and that said Plan must be updated and adopted within a five year cycle; and

WHEREAS the (local government) has performed a comprehensive review and evaluation of each section of the previously approved Hazard Mitigation Plan and has updated the said plan as required under regulations and at 44 CFR Part 201 and according to guidance issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management, and that the plans have been updated in accordance with federal laws including the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, as amended; the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, as amended; the National Dam Safety Program Act, as amended; as required under regulations at 44 CFR Part 201, and according to guidance issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management; and

WHEREAS, it is the intent of the Board of Commissioners of McDowell County to fulfill this obligation in order that the County will be eligible for federal and state assistance in the event that a state of disaster is declared for a hazard event affecting the County;

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Board of Commissioners of McDowell County hereby:

- 1. Adopts the Toe River Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan.*
- 2. Agrees to take such other official action as may be reasonably necessary to carry out the objectives of the Hazard Mitigation Plan.*

Adopted this the 16th day of February 2026.

Administrative Items

There are two administrative items for presentation for approval: a project budget ordinance for the HUD HOME program, and a project ordinance and resolution authorizing the receipt and expenditure of the \$100,000 NCDEQ grant that is being spent on the regionalization and partnership project.

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

Closed Session [NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(3)]

Vice Chair Greene made a motion to go into closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(3) at 12:06 pm, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to come out of closed session at 12:53, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:54 pm, with a second by Vice Chairman Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.

Attest:

Madalyn Robinson
Clerk to the Board

Tony Brown
Chairman