

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
REGULAR SESSION – February 9, 2026**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 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; Will Kehler, Emergency Services Director; Sarah Brewer, Human Services Director; Jason Hollifield, Transit Director; Linda Onufrey, McDowell County Tax Collections

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the January 12th Regular Session Minutes, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

**Approval of Agenda**

Mr. Wooten requested to add two items to the agenda under New Business, with item D. being floodplain maps, and item E. being information on Baxter Healthcare layoffs. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the agenda with the additional agenda items requested by the County Manager. Commissioner Ellis seconded the motion. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

**Recognition of Emergency Services Staff**

Will Kehler, Emergency Services Director, expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to recognize his Emergency Operations Center Staff. The Emergency Operations Center (referred to as EOC) is activated prior to, during, and after a disaster. Mr. Kehler explained that

they've had several long activations within the last five to six years with COVID and Hurricane Helene. 2026 began with two Emergency Operations Center activations due to winter weather.

Mr. Kehler explained that his staff is hard-working, committed to the County, and they do what's right every day for the residents of the County. Emergency Operation Center's staff have their assigned daily job within McDowell County Emergency Services Divisions and take on additional responsibilities during an EOC activation.

Mr. Kelher recognized the Emergency Services staff and the Emergency Operations Center staff, along with Fire, Rescue, and Law Enforcement partners. Mr. Kehler recognized employees one by one and gave introductions, and recognized human services and recreation department roles as well. The Commissioners expressed their gratitude to the EOC employees and Mr. Kehler for their hard work and support to the County and its residents.

### **McDowell Transit Operations Update**

Sarah Brewer, Human Services Director, and Jason Hollifield, Transit Director, gave an update on McDowell Transit Operations. Mr. Hollifield gave a yearly update on the Transit Department.

#### McDowell Transit Statistics:

Total Operating Days: 238

Total Miles Driven: 275,137

Service Hours: 16,978

Total Passenger Trips: 27,485

No Shows: 594

Rider Cancels: 6,105

Denied Rides: 2,192

Non-Ambulatory Rides: 1,563

Senior Center Rides: 2,280

Medicaid Rides: 2,108

Managed Care Rides: 1,604

Hospital Contract Rides: 36

Mr. Hollifield introduced the proposed policy change for no-shows and cancellations and asked the Board for approval to modify the cancellation policy. The policy proposes that non-portal trips must be cancelled a minimum of 24 hours before the scheduled trip. Failure to cancel within this time frame will result in a no-show. Vice-Chair Greene moved to grant the policy change presented by staff, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Hollifield covered denied ride statistics and the use of expansion vans. Mr. Hollifield requested approval from the board to start the formal process for two additional expansion vans.

Mr. Hollifield noted that if they begin the process of expanding their fleet now, it would take approximately two years to see the actual vans on the lot. Replacement vans require a 10% County match, and expansion vans require a 20% County match. Currently, Transit has 11 vans in the fleet, and the new van request would increase the fleet to 13 vans. Commissioner Walker made a motion to begin the process of reviewing and receiving information for a formal request this fall, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Hollifield proposed changes to the western border of McDowell to include McDowell Transit Express in Old Fort. This request would utilize current staff and current resources, and this would help offset the two new expansion vans. The hope is to expand by spring. Vice-chair Greene made a motion to grant the approval for the expansion of Express service into Old Fort as requested, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Walker emphasized the outstanding job that Mr. Hollifield is doing and the Board thanked him for everything he does for McDowell County.

### **Property Tax Collection Items**

Linda Onufrey presented on three property tax collection items to the board. Mrs. Onufrey provided the tax lean advertisement to the board, which she is required to advertise in The McDowell News. Ms. Onufrey provided the total unpaid taxes for the current year 2025. The report included county and district taxes on real property. The balance as of January 30<sup>th</sup> 2026 was \$2,565,4110. Mrs. Onufrey provided a property tax delinquent list for the board's review. Mrs. Onufrey sent out the tax lien advertisement delinquent notices on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, with the total of those notices being \$5,777 (\$4,615 was real property, \$1162 was personal and business).

The cost to do the advertisement is quoted at \$4,649.40, the same as last year's cost. Mrs. Onufrey recommended advertising the date March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026, in the McDowell News. The last date to pay would be March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026, and the notices that were distributed reflect that as well. Vice-Chair Greene asked about scenarios where collection doesn't take place. Mrs. Onufrey mentioned the 10-year statute of limitations and mentioned that she can't forcibly collect on anything that's past 10 years. If it is still currently in their system, they can foreclose upon a property. The tax lien advertisement becomes a lien on anything, including personal property.

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

### **Water System Project Updates**

Mr. Wooten presented the Water System Project Updates.

#### Nebo

- The East End Project began on August 4. This project is scheduled to be completed in April 2026. Some sections of the work are completed, but not yet certified.
- Nebo Phases 2 A & B are complete except for the installation of a new master meter in front of The Attic.

- The small extension project near Exit 90 is more or less 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.
- Phase 3 (Randolph Road) will start construction within the next month or so. The complicating factor is that the contractor working on East End was also the successful bidder on this project, so they will need to work to coordinate the work on two projects at once.
- The master meter on US 70 has been moved to the location immediately west of the Beaman Road intersection. The customers on Beaman Road and along US 70 will be transferred to the County over the next few weeks.

Providence Area/West Marion Elementary Area

- The engineer has provided the 90% plans to staff for review.
- The State Historic Preservation Office has directed that a historic site evaluation be completed for this project. This will take 2-3 months.
- 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 State Water Infrastructure Authority will vote on the applications at its February 18, 2026, meeting.

Asset Inventory and Assessment Project

The Asset Inventory and Assessment Project is now underway. The first steps involve doing a complete inventory of the County's water assets and updating the mapping. The GIS mapping process is nearing completion.

Partnership Grant

NCDEQ has provided the County \$100,000 to develop post-Helene partnerships with Marion, Old Fort, and the County. A kickoff meeting was held in January with the Town, City, and County staff and elected officials. Next steps will involve more focused discussions on collaborative best practices.

**County Policy Proposals Second Reading**

Mr. Wooten presented the New County Policy proposals to the board for the second reading.

Firstly, the Penny Shortage Policy was presented. Mr. Wooten noted that recommendations for this policy were based on information from the School of Government. Vice-Chair Greene asked about the penny shortage policy and if it's uniform across departments. Vice-chair Greene asked where the extra charge would go and if it would continue to belong to the customer. Commissioner Garner added that most people could pay with a card or check and pay the exact amount. Commissioner Walker discussed the standard procedure across the state for the penny shortage.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the policy recommended by staff, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-1, the motion passed

Ayes:

Nays:

Chairman Brown

Vice-Chair Greene

Commissioner Garner

Commissioner Ellis

Commissioner Walker

Secondly, the McDowell County Employee Service Recognition Policy. Mr. Wooten asked if they're looking back or forward to include past employees. Commissioner Ellis noted the challenges that could follow if the policy is retroactive. Commissioner Walker added that the employee should get the pin that retired early. Mr. Wooten stated that what is presented before the board is consistent with the retirement plan. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the policy as presented and include the clause that staff may use sick time accrued to equal the total time served to receive a pin or cash equivalent. There was no second on this motion.

Chairman Brown made a motion to table the decision until the next meeting, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-1, the motion passed.

Ayes:

Nays:

Chairman Brown

Commissioner Walker

Vice-Chair Greene

Commissioner Garner

Commissioner Ellis

### **Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Update and Approvals**

The property tax collection rate is 93.8% through January, and there are no budget approvals for right now. Mr. Wooten noted that staff is monitoring congressional action related to SNAP and food stamps. There could be impacts to the state and County but they're ultimately dependent on what the General Assembly may or may not do. McDowell County, along with other Counties are advocating for state assistance. If the state does not assist with costs that are being shifted downward from the Federal Government, the County will incur more funding responsibility for SNAP administration and determination costs for Medicaid. Mr. Wooten continues to advocate and monitor these potential impacts.

### **Administrative Items for Review and Approval**

Mr. Wooten presented the EMS write-offs and Nebo Water Leak Waiver for approval. The Finance Department has requested the write-off of the non-collectible EMS bills in the attachment, totaling \$44,920.29. There are Nebo Water leak waivers totaling \$280.

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

### **Property Tax Releases, Refunds, and Discoveries**

Mr. Wooten presented Property Tax Releases under/over \$100, Refunds, Discoveries, and Motor Vehicle Refunds for approval from the board.

Releases Over \$100: \$53.99

Releases Under \$100: \$633.77

Refunds: \$364.86

Motor Vehicle Refunds: \$1,813.70

Discoveries: \$0

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

### **Flood Plain Maps**

Mr. Wooten gave an update on floodplain mapping to the Board. Mr. Wooten noted that in September of 2023, the County received notification that FEMA was doing updates to the floodplain maps. Recently, staff received a letter from the flood mapping program with the state in conjunction with FEMA regarding changes to floodplain mapping on parcels. Most of the changes for parcels involved are minor tweaks. The new rules and maps have been advertised in the McDowell News by FEMA. There is a 90-day period that concludes on April 21<sup>st</sup>. Commissioner Walker asked for the number of property owners whose status has changed, but staff have not been able to obtain that count or a property owner/parcel list.

### **Baxter Healthcare Lay-off Information**

Mr. Wooten provided an update on Baxter Healthcare and stated that Baxter Healthcare has confirmed a layoff for 90 employees. McDowell County has reached out to the company offering support for employees. Partners such as Workforce Development, MEDA, Chamber of Commerce, and NC Works have spoken with Baxter to provide resources to employees who have been affected.

### **Citizen Comment**

None

### **Commissioner and Staff Reports:**

None

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 6:23 p.m., with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Attest:

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Madalyn Robinson  
Clerk to the Board

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Tony Brown  
Chair