

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

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 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

**Members Absent**

Patrick Ellis

**Others Present**

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board; Sarah Brewer, Human Services Director; Dustin Burleson, Vaya Community Relations Regional Director; Captain Paul Alkire and Lt. Detective Chris Taylor, McDowell County Sheriff's Office.

**Call to Order**

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 11:30 am. Vice-Chair 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. Mr. Wooten added that some changes were made to the agenda to formally include Item A. under new business (MCSO Staffing Request) and Item C. (Memorial Park Road Intersection Improvement Project). Commissioner Garner requested an addition under Item D for other business. (Part-time employee moving to full-time for the Register of Deeds). Commissioner Walker amended his motion to include the additions, and Vice-Chair Greene seconded this. By a 5-0 vote, the motion passed.

**Human Services Update**

Human Services Director Sarah Brewer gave the monthly operational update. Mrs. Brewer began by highlighting Safe Babies Court, a new program with McDowell County.

#### Safe Babies Court:

- SCB is a national program that started in 2005 with the mission to transform the child welfare process from an adversarial one to a collective trauma-informed one with partnerships between court systems, child welfare agencies, families, and the community. Began in NC in 2024 as part of Chief Justice Newby's initiative recognizing Adverse Childhood experiences (ACEs). This program connects children ages 0-3 and their families with intensive support and services.
- Promotes healthy development for children, Safe and timely permanence for the children  
Frequent Judicial Status conferences and Family Team Meetings. The program provides oversight to ensure that the family's needs are being met.
- Currently in the following Counties in North Carolina: *Brunswick, Durham, Mitchell, New Hanover, Yancey, McDowell, Rutherford*

#### Safe Babies in McDowell County

- The program began in September 2025
- 8 spots were allotted to McDowell County Families, and 5 families are currently enrolled, with 1 social worker dedicated to this program.
- Family visitation expansion in McDowell County: Mrs. Brewer identified the need, reached out to community partners, collaborated with the attorney, met with Judges and SBC program coordinators, and trained volunteers willing to serve. The first family will begin additional visitation expansion this week.
- Goals Moving Forward: Closely monitor visitation expansion, continue to meet with volunteers to work through challenges, continue to meet with Judges and SBC Program Partners, expand visitation for all families enrolled in the SBC Program, and ensure staff receive additional training regarding the Safe Babies Program.

Commissioner Walker expressed his gratitude for the new program and asked if the reunification process could be charted. Commissioner Garner added that the SBC program was intended to help the reunification process, and added that she thinks it'll benefit children and parents. Vice-chair Greene added that he's heard how much better the work environment was at DSS since Mrs. Brewer was hired as the DSS director and thanked her for her hard work.

#### Vaya Health Update

Dustin Burleson from Vaya Health gave a quarterly update. Mr. Burleson covered the upcoming *Sequential Intercept Mapping & Taking Action for Change* event (March 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup>). This event helps develop and implement plans for community change

through cross-system collaboration. This workshop hopes to enhance practices and facilitate organizational change utilizing innovative and dynamic tools to map systems, identify gaps in service, and clarify community resources.

Mr. Burleson covered the Rural Health Transformation Program. This program was established through HR1, which is a federal reconciliation bill enacted in July. This program provides one-time federal funding supporting states in strengthening rural healthcare access, quality, and outcomes across five years. Through this program, along with the Department of Health and Human Services, investment is happening with innovation, infrastructure partnerships, and workforce development. This will aid in transforming rural health delivery across all of the rural Counties in North Carolina. This program will utilize resources that already exist, such as hospitals, FQAC's, and local Health Departments, behavioral health providers, churches, non-profits, EMS, schools, and non-medical services in rural Counties. In North Carolina, a network of regional organizations will be formed called the Roots Hub (Rural Organizations Orchestrating Transformation for Sustainability). This will bring partners together, coordinate services, track referrals and outcomes, manage funding, and make sure that initiatives match community priorities. There will be a Roots Hub lead responsible for coordinating and guiding the regional network of partners to improve health access in rural communities. This will expand access where gaps exist and focus on areas where rural communities are already effective. Regarding primary care and chronic diseases, diabetes and hypertension management, cancer screening, smoking cessation and preventative care will be offered. This program will also address maternal and infant health, behavioral health, and substance use (improving crisis response).

The RHTP will invest in rural North Carolina's workforce, including rural residencies and fellowships, training hubs, behavioral health certification programs, community health workers, and paramedics. They plan to address issues such as food access, transportation, housing affordability and stability, and digital access. This is a five-year strategy that will improve measurable outcomes, reduce preventable emergency room visits, lower chronic disease burden, and increase provider-to-population ratios. Vaya Health, along with Appalachian State and community partners, will be applying for the Roots Hub Lead for four regions (McDowell County sits in Region 1). April 2<sup>nd</sup> is the deadline for the application, and the award will be on June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Each region will have local decision-making with a Regional Decision Council made up of community members, community-based organizations, providers, and more. This will allow the communities in each region to ensure priorities fit best with the area. Mr. Burleson added that he did not need any approval from the board but wanted to make them aware of this upcoming process.

Chairman Brown asked if a letter of support was needed, and Mr. Burleson stated they're still in the process and would reach out in the future if this is needed. Mr. Wooten recommended approving the letter of support now in case this is needed in the future. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve a resolution in support of Vaya Health, and it was seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a motion of 4-0, the motion passed.

## **MCSO Staffing Request**

Mr. Wooten led with the MCSO staffing request on behalf of Sheriff Buchanan. Mr. Alkire and Mr. Taylor were present in the Sheriff's absence to answer any technical questions about the request.

About 11 months ago, a budget presentation was held for the current fiscal year that included a position for the Sheriff's Office in the recommendation for a detective that would do drug interdiction. The original proposal was for the use of Federal Asset Forfeiture Funds for the additional position, and then work on a transition plan to other funding, primarily for the following year. After research and policy clarification, this funding would not work to fund the additional position; however, it will work for SRO positions. The request from Sheriff Buchanan and Chief Deputy Mace is for the original proposal to be modified to fit what is allowed (SRO position). The Asset Forfeiture Funds would be used to fund an SRO position for a year, and those funds, with the addition of Jail Revenue Funds, would be used to pay for the detective position for the coming fiscal year. The ask is that the County General Fund, starting July 2027, would pay for the detective position. If the funding is not there (\$77,000 for salary/benefit total), is not there, would Mr. Wooten and Chief Deputy Mace have the conversation during next year's budget process to work out another funding opportunity? Vice-Chair Greene added that he is in favor of approving the position, provided that, in the future, if funding is not available, they can sit down and work something out regarding this position.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the position per the direction of Mr. Wooten, and that the funding is taken from the SRO, supplanted, and moved as stated, and that Mr. Wooten and Chief Deputy Mace work out things in the future if needed. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

## **Administrative Items**

Mr. Wooten presented the administrative items, including the Reappraisal Contract, Purchasing Policy Draft, Personnel Policy Item, Project Budget Ordinance, and the Baldwin Building Lease.

Mr. Wooten led with the reappraisal contract. Staff were made aware several weeks ago about the reappraisal contract that was drafted and sent to the firm (Pearson's Appraisal Services at that time), which was signed by the company's new owner, Vision Government Solutions. The company was in the process of being sold to Vision Government Solutions. This contract is a valid and enforceable contract per the guidance of County Attorney, Mr. Coats. Staff recommends a clear and new document so there isn't any confusion about the cooperate ownership. The company has sent back a revised document that demonstrates the corporate structure and has been

reviewed by Mr. Coats. Mr. Wooten asked the Board to acknowledge the new document and allow the document to be executed by Chairman Brown. Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the new document with the effective date of December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and was seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten moved on to the Purchasing Policy Draft, submitted by Mr. Hollifield (McDowell Transit). This policy is based on the need from the Federal Transit Administration to update the counties' purchasing policies for new Federal language. This is a first reading of the policy and will go before the Board on April 13<sup>th</sup> for a second reading. Mr. Wooten asked the Board for any questions or suggestions in the upcoming weeks.

Mr. Wooten introduced the Personnel Policy item and noted that this could be seen as a bigger policy question as opposed to one particular person. Mrs. Brewer reached out a few weeks ago regarding a candidate for a position in the Economic Services Unit. The current policy does not allow for the hiring of the potential candidate based on the fact that the candidate's sister-in-law works in the same unit. Mr. Wooten asked if they'd like to waive this as a one-time thing or revise the policy. There has been no interview or job offer based on the current policy, and Mr. Wooten requested feedback from the Board on this. Vice-Chair Greene stated that they need consider this issue and how it could affect future circumstances. Chairman Brown noted that he would respect Mrs. Brewer's authority and opinion on this. Commissioner Walker added that the policy needs to include a supervision clause for family members requiring Board approval. Vice-chair Greene stated that he couldn't support employment unless the policy was revised. Commissioner Walker made a motion to have staff bring back the revised policy for the Board to review on April 13<sup>th</sup>, with the added clause that a family member may not supervise another family member. Vice-chair Greene seconded Commissioner Walker's motion. By a 4-0 vote, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten presented the Project Budget Ordinance for the Foothills NC Home Consortium Program for the 2023 year. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve as presented, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a 4-0 vote, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten presented the MTCC Lease. The lease presented the previous week was an old version; the updated version was included for Board approval. Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve as presented, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a 4-0 vote, the motion passed.

### **Memorial Park Road Intersection Improvement Project**

Mr. Wooten stated that NCDOT has reached out and has money for safety-concerned projects. The new school building is planned for East Court Street, and NCDOT is starting to look at traffic improvements in the area. NCDOT wants to make the Memorial Park intersection a T-intersection. The County and City have been asked to endorse the project and approve the resolution. Commissioner Walker made a

motion to endorse the project and approve the resolution provided by DOT, with a second from Commissioner Garner. By a 4-0 vote, the motion passed.

**RESOLUTION ENDORSING NCDOT DIVISION 13 FUNDING REQUEST  
FOR INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS AT US 70 E AND SR 1536 –  
MEMORIAL PARK ROAD**

*WHEREAS, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Division 13 is preparing a funding request to perform intersection improvements at the intersection of US 70 E and SR 1536 – Memorial Park Road in McDowell County, North Carolina; and*

*WHEREAS, a conceptual plan has been prepared for this project, which proposes to realign the intersection of US 70 E and SR 1536 – Memorial Park Road to the east of the current alignment, such that Memorial Park Road intersects US 70 at a 90-degree angle, and to add an all-way stop at this intersection to improve safety and traffic flow; and*

*WHEREAS, the project is located just east of the Marion City Limits, and the County recognizes the benefits of improved safety, traffic operations, and access for residents, businesses, and emergency services in the area; and*

*WHEREAS, NCDOT requires a resolution from the local government endorsing this project in order to request State funding, with no local funds or match required; and*

*WHEREAS, the McDowell County Board of Commissioners supports the submission of a funding request by NCDOT Division 13 to implement the proposed improvements at this intersection;*

*NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the McDowell County Board of  
Commissioners:*

- 1. That the Board hereby endorses the project as proposed by NCDOT Division 13 for the intersection improvements at US 70 E and SR 1536 – Memorial Park Road.*
- 2. That the Board supports the submission of a funding request to the North Carolina Department of Transportation for State funding to carry out the project.*
- 3. That the Board recognizes the positive impact this project will have on safety, traffic flow, and the overall transportation network within McDowell County.*

*ADOPTED this 16th day of March, 2026, by the McDowell County Board of Commissioners.*

**Register of Deeds**

Mr. Wooten stated that Commissioner Garner had reached out several weeks ago regarding staffing at the Register of Deeds. Ms. Effler, Register of Deeds, had requested to upgrade a part-time position to a full-time position in the prior budget process. Per the last discussion on this, it was agreed to look at this once they entered the budget year and review Register of Deeds revenues, general sales tax, and other revenues. Ms. Bell, Finance Director, and Mr. Wooten have discussed this, and revenues are sufficient to support the position upgrade request. Vice-Chair moved to approve the position upgrade request, with a second from Commissioner Garner. By a 4-0 vote, the motion passed.

**Closed Session [NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(3) and (4)]**

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to go into closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(3) regarding Opioid Litigation Update and Economic Development at 12:21 pm, with a second by Commissioner Walker. By a 4-0 vote, the motion passed.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to come out of closed session at 12:32 pm, with a second by Vice-Chair Greene. By a 4-0 vote, the motion passed.

**Adjournment**

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:33 pm, with a second by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned at 12:33 pm.

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Madalyn Robinson  
Clerk to the Board

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tony Brown  
Chairman