

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – April 20, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, April 20th, 2026, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

Members Present

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

Members Absent

Patrick Ellis

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board; Fred Coats, County Attorney; Brian Flynn, OneDigital; Sarah Brewer, Human Services Director; Weyland Prebor, Senior Center Director

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 11:30 am. Commissioner 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 as presented, with a second from Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

ALS Awareness Month Proclamation

Mr. Wooten presented the request to proclaim April as ALS Awareness Month. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the proclamation for April as ALS Awareness Month, with a second by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed

PROCLAMATION

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Awareness Month

WHEREAS, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a progressive, fatal neurodegenerative disease in which a person's brain loses connection with their muscles, slowly reducing a person's ability to walk, talk, eat, and eventually breathe; and

WHEREAS, thousands of new amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) cases are reported every year, and estimates show that every 90 minutes, someone is diagnosed with ALS and someone passes away from ALS; and

WHEREAS, on average, patients diagnosed with ALS survive only two to five years from the time of diagnosis; and

WHEREAS, the exact causes of ALS are unknown and there is no known cure for ALS; and

WHEREAS, people who have served in the military are more likely to develop ALS and die from the disease than those with no history of military service; and

WHEREAS, securing access to new therapies, durable medical equipment, and communication technologies is of vital importance to people living with ALS; and

WHEREAS, clinical trials play a pivotal role in evaluating new treatments, enhancing quality of life, and fostering assistive technologies for those living with ALS; and

WHEREAS, the ALS Association is the largest philanthropic funder of ALS research globally and has committed more than \$154 million to support more than 550 projects across the United States and 18 other countries; and

WHEREAS, the ALS Association is committed to make ALS livable and cure it for everyone, everywhere; and

WHEREAS, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Awareness Month provides an opportunity to increase public awareness of the dire circumstances of people living with ALS, acknowledge the terrible impact this disease has on those individuals and their families, and support research to eradicate this disease;

Now, therefore, I, Chairman Brown, do hereby proclaim the month of May 2026 as ALS Awareness Month. I call upon all Americans to join in supporting ALS research, advocating for increased funding, and standing in solidarity with those affected by this relentless disease.

ADOPTED this day, the 20th of April, 2026.

County Employee Health Insurance Renewal

Brian Flynn from OneDigital reviewed the County's Health Insurance renewal for FY2027. The 2024/25 plan was 10% lower than the previous year, and Mr. Flynn noted that they're on par with that for this year. and continues to be this year as well. Across healthcare, there have been spikes in pharmacy costs, but OneDigital is lower by 25%. They're seeing a spike on the medical side, but OneDigital is under trend for the overall year and remain 10% lower than it was two years ago. From a budget perspective, they're looking at an increase of 3%.

Mr. Flynn asked that they decide on reinsurance. The company they're currently with is called WellPoint, and they've asked for a 0.5% increase on the overall premium. The new contract will begin July 1, 2026. Vice-Chair Greene asked what the 0.5% comes out to in dollars. Mr. Flynn said \$5,000 is the amount. Commissioner Walker asked about the rolling 12 and PE/PM cost. Mr. Wooten added that they're currently closer to \$1,000 per month for PE/PM. Mr. Flynn stated that the rolling 12 is at \$1079 per month currently, and they project \$1,044 for the upcoming year. The net cost includes pharmacy reimbursements, high-cost payments, employee contributions, and rebates.

Commissioner Walker moved to accept staff's recommendation to increase by the recommended amount, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a motion of 4-0, the motion passed.

Human Services Update

Human Services Director Sarah Brewer gave the monthly Memorandum of Understanding data. Mrs. Brewer discussed some trending data from the previous months. The number of children testing positive in the community has been high in recent months, and they continue to monitor this. They've reallocated a position to be an in-home service worker designed to work with families and work out safety issues before the removal of the child. They're utilizing a temporary safety provider to work with children and families to improve the environment before returning the child to the home. Mrs. Brewer will continue to monitor this trend in data.

The number of children placed in McDowell County is significantly higher this month, and they've tried to hone in on this and explore safe kinship through the court process. The state is providing training called SEEK training. This is a new resource to find the families of children they take custody of, so the child can remain with their family. Commissioner Garner asked if family members are receiving kinship payments for keeping children. Mrs. Brewer explained that this is a monthly payment that is received. Mrs. Brewer invited the Board to attend the Child Abuse Prevention Month event on April 21st at 10:30 am. Attendees will be wearing blue to show support. The Board thanked Mrs. Brewer for her update.

Senior Center Update

Senior Center Director Weyland Prebor gave an update on an innovative fall prevention program. The McDowell County Senior Center, in partnership with the Community Paramedic Program through McDowell County Emergency Medical Services (EMS), piloted the use of DwellSafe, an innovative Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, to support fall prevention efforts in older adults. This pilot aimed to assist community paramedics in identifying home hazards, reducing fall risk, and supporting clients in preventing both first-time falls and recurrent falls, including reducing the need for lift-assist EMS calls. The project had 67 clients at the start of the study, with 62 completing the study. DwellSafe uses a "human-in-the-loop" AI model, meaning all AI-generated home safety reports are reviewed and refined by a licensed occupational therapist before being shared with clients. With client consent, paramedics used the DwellSafe app to scan rooms where clients either spent the majority of their time or had experienced previous falls. Each client then received a personalized home safety report, including immediate safety recommendations, a list of suggested home modifications, and guidance on the use of specific safety devices. With funding from the Innovations in Fall Prevention Grant, many of these modifications, including grab bars, lighting, ramps, and other safety aids, were installed directly in clients' homes. 85% of clients had a reduced fear of falling after completing the project. This leads to a better quality of life and continued participation in daily activities.

McDowell has created a replicable model for other communities to use based on data from McDowell. Mr. Prebor thanked Shannon Jones and Jaquelyn Fox for their partnership in making this happen. Commissioner Walker asked who community members reach out to for the installation of similar equipment. Reach out to himself or Shannon Jones with McDowell EMS. Commissioner Garner added that this program is for the vast majority of people in the community. Vice-Chair Greene asked if there was a cost scale that could be provided to folks interested. Chairman Brown thanked Mr. Prebor for all that he's done for the community.

Administrative Items

Mr. Wooten presented several administrative items for approval to the Board. Mr. Wooten presented resolutions authorizing the pre-application and full application for three CDBG-DR projects. Projects include an expansion to the Old Fort Senior Center, a new 911 Center, and a new animal shelter. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the resolutions as presented, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten moved on to the Reimbursement Resolution and Budget Amendment for McDowell County Sheriff's Office Vehicles. The Sheriff requested the purchase of nine vehicles for \$649,729. The resolution and budget amendment would allow for the financing to come at a later date. Vice-Chair made a motion to approve as presented, with a second from Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed. Commissioner Walker requested a letter stating what vehicles are being bought by MCSO.

Mr. Wooten presented the USDA EWP Program resolutions for approval. The USDA has established the Emergency Watershed Program to clear debris from waterways in the vicinity of infrastructure and homes. Sites that were impacted by Helene have been identified throughout the County. The resolution would authorize the submission of the grant, which does not have a local match. More information will be provided in the future on this. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the resolution, with a second by Vice-Chair Greene. 4-0, motion passed. Vice-Chair Greene thanked Mr. Wooten and staff for searching for funding that is grant funding.

Employee Recognitions

Mr. Wooten introduced the employee recognition topic regarding intangibles, and various departments and employee group recognition suggested by Commissioner Garner. Chairman Brown asked if the clerk could oversee this and notify the board of recognition days and weeks. Commissioner Walker asked if department heads could notify staff about these events at department head meetings for staff to keep on record. Commissioner Garner asked how to go about purchasing items for recognition events. Mr. Wooten will look into creating a line item for employee recognition during the budget process. Mr. Wooten and Ms. Robinson will work with schedules to coordinate events for recognition days and weeks to show appreciation. Vice-Chair Greene added that he'd like to be equitable and make sure all County employees are recognized periodically. Commissioner Garner asked if department heads could create days for departmental recognition if a recognition day does not already exist. Mr. Wooten and Ms. Robinson will look into this.

Closed Session [NCGS 143-311.18 (a) (4) & (6)]

Commissioner Walker moved to go into closed session at 12:15 pm, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed. The board convened in closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-311.18 (a) (4) & (6). Commissioner Walker made a motion to return to open session at 12:43 pm, with a second from Vice-Chair Greene. By a motion of 4-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:43, with a second from Vice-Chair Greene. By a motion of 4-0, the motion passed.