

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION – April 29, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, April 29th, 2026, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

Members Present

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

Members Absent

Chairman, Tony Brown; Patrick Ellis

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board;

Call to Order

Vice-Chairman Greene called the meeting to order at 12:15 pm.

Legislative Update

Mr. Wooten began discussing the Legislative Update regarding the Great Meadows Property. The property is over 1,000 acres, primarily in Burke (200 acres in McDowell), and is currently owned by Great Meadows out of Mitchell County. There has been discussion of partnership and development of the property between Burke and McDowell in years past. This property has been marketed for decades. In 2023, State Legislation was approved, which granted \$23.5 million to Burke Economic Development towards the purchase of the property on both sides, and \$12 million was appropriated for utility development. In 2025, there was a request by Burke County to temporarily utilize some of the purchase money for the development of shell buildings in Burke County. Communication for this took place after legislation was filed. Burke County was authorized to borrow up to \$20 million of the purchase funding for shell buildings. Commissioner Walker asked who authorized Burke County to do this and Mr. Wooten added that the General Assembly authorized this. After authorization, Burke Development sent funding to Burke County Government as needed for the construction of the shell buildings. One building is in development, and the idea is that the buildings would be sold, and funding would be returned back into the account. The intent for the shell buildings was communicated at the time to McDowell from the delegation.

McDowell County was contacted a week prior by members of the delegation that Burke County had requested to utilize some of the utility funding (referring to the \$12 million received for Utility Development) for their water and sewer system needs. Burke had an emerging crisis with a sewer station and this was communicated to the delegation in the request. The proposal was to take \$9 million from the utility funding for sewer. Mr. Wooten referred to the Medicaid Rebase Bill (passed in the House and on the way to the Senate), which includes language for Burke County to utilize for sewer needs. Communication and outreach have taken place with the delegation to communicate McDowell's needs. The communication received back has been a willingness to put this on hold and add language that states McDowell and Burke can utilize the funding proportionally.

In the midst of all this, Burke Development Incorporated (BDI) applied, in partnership with others, for Economic Development Administration grant funds on the federal level, using the money previously discussed as a grant match. Neither Burke nor McDowell County was notified of this. The grant proposal from Burke, if awarded, would bring upwards of \$50 million to the region. McDowell is not included in this, but there is a potential for a regional impact via establishing a life science interest in Western North Carolina. After speaking with the Burke County manager, Mr. Wooten suggests asking the General Assembly to authorize the Burke County Grant, but if the grant is not awarded by the deadline, Burke Development would have to redirect the money back to the two Counties at a proportional share (80% Burke and 20% McDowell). If a grant is awarded, funding would go towards utility development.

Vice-Chair Greene asked who notified Mr. Wooten, and Mr. Abernathy provided the information first, and Mr. Wooten called Burke County after for an explanation. Commissioner Walker asked if there was a contract in place or an MOU. Mr. Wooten stated that McDowell is offered a first right of refusal, and this is documented on paper. Commissioner Walker stated that he feels McDowell should be entitled to three years of interest on \$23.5 million and McDowell's share of the \$12 million for utilities for three years and a contract. Mr. Wooten's suggestion for language change in the draft Bill is subject to approval from the Board.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to ask the delegation to amend the bill, stating that McDowell County would retain 20% of the 9 million dollars to use for water purposes and 20% of the interest earned on the money when Burke receives their share of the \$9 million. Vice-Chair Greene seconded this motion. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to request from Burke Development Incorporated that McDowell County be given its share of the interest earned on the \$23.5 million at whatever time the money is forgiven. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Walker made a motion for staff to contact Burke's County manager and Burke Development Incorporated to formulate a contract that describes

the duties and obligations of all parties involved. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Utility Discussion

Mr. Wooten mentioned the joint discussion with the City and Town for water in January regarding how to better support each other and be interconnected via infrastructure. There is interest in water services near the Greenlee section of McDowell due to the industrial development lacking water service. Mr. Wooten requests permission to study serving the area with public water, and whether water coming from the City of Marion System or from the Town of Old Fort would be best. Commissioner Walker made a motion to give staff the ability to check on the feasibility of this project, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Commissioner Walker made a motion to adjourn at 12:51 pm, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.