

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
MCDOWELL COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL SESSION – May 26, 2026**

**Assembly**

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Tuesday, May 26, 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; Alison Bell, Finance Director

**Call to Order**

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

**Budget Workshop**

Commissioner Walker asked for an update on the Services Building air conditioning. Mr. Wooten said the bidding on the new system should start soon, and the work would begin at the end of the summer. Vice-Chair Greene asked what functions would be able to work from home, and Mr. Wooten stated that Cooperative Extension would be able to, but this is an unlikely option for other County functions.

Mr. Wooten stated that the budget is scheduled to be presented on Friday morning. Below is what will be presented on Friday if there is no redirection from the Board.

Revised Draft of Budget:

- 1% COLA

- Health insurance budgeted at \$1,000/employee/month (approximately \$200 below actual cost)
- 1% increase for the school system and community college
- Assumes adoption of County Vehicle Fee at \$7/year per registered vehicle
- Appropriates \$589,931 in fund balance to balance the budget
- No new positions
- Maximizes property and sales tax revenue projections.

Commissioner Ellis asked where the fund balance would be left. Mr. Wooten stated around the 32-33% range. Mr. Wooten added that the state provides the best practice of a fund balance of roughly 40%. Vice-Chair Greene asked about contributions to non-County operations and if these are not increased, what that number would be. Ms. Bell stated that no non-profits have increased, and MEDA was the only one with a 1% increase. Contracted non-profits total roughly \$100,000.

Vice-Chair Greene referred to the health insurance options and asked what employees contribute to this. Ms. Bell stated it's \$50 a month for employees.

Commissioner Walker asked about the health insurance being set at \$910 per employee per month rather than \$1,000, and Ms. Bell added that the number for health insurance is based on the numbers from previous years.

Chairman Brown added that he suggests pulling the \$350,000 out of the fund balance to provide for a higher COLA, funding for schools, and funding for MTCC. Commissioner Walker asked that Mr. Wooten go over the options for funding aside from property taxes. Commissioner Ellis asked about the solid waste funding and where the County is on this. Commissioner Ellis asked which surrounding counties do not charge trash fees. Mr. Wooten stated that most surrounding counties charge some form of solid waste fee.

Commissioner Garner stated that there are 19,729 households, and a total of \$2.4 million would be brought in with the \$120 fee, with elderly, veteran, and disabled individuals receiving discounts in support of the trash fee. Commissioner Walker asked about the married couples receiving discounts. The maximum for the elderly exemption is \$38,000, and the board discussed increasing the number for this. Commissioner Garner asked about the private haulers not paying a fee to go over the scale. Chairman Brown added that there should be a tipping fee for private haulers, and the board agreed. Commissioner Ellis asked if the City would work with the County on the 65% increase in water fees and asked that Mr. Wooten get an answer from the City on this.

Mr. Wooten stated that if they implement the commercial charge, the businesses would need to be pulled out of the availability charge scenario. Vice-Chair Greene stated he had no issue with the County vehicle fee.

Commissioner Walker stated that he is against the availability fee of \$140 for this year, and if he joins on this, the elderly exemption fee needs to be raised to \$65,000.

Commissioner Walker supports budgeting \$910 per employee per month for employee health insurance and is open to considering the possibility of cutting non-profits for a year, and supports all options being looked at. Ms. Bell stated that history shows the expenditure for health insurance. Ellis agrees to go \$49,900 for the elderly exemption. Commissioner Garner asked if any departments were requesting new positions, and Mr. Wooten stated 911, Sheriff's Department, Tax Assessing, and a new position for training a finance director in preparation for Ms. Bell's retirement.

Chairman Brown asked about the quarter sales tax and asked if this could be put on the ballot for this year and added that he'd tend to want to go that way and earmark it for landfill. This would provide funding for the increased COLA and funding for schools by 1%. Commissioner Walker added that if it doesn't pass, the money from the solid waste would suffice. Vice-Chair Greene added that they should educate the public on this increase. Vice-Chair Greene asked if Mr. Wooten could find out if it's too late to put this on the ballot. Educating the public on this would need to be reviewed by an attorney. Commissioner Walker added that this needs to be tied to something people would care about, like the school system. Vice-Chair Greene asked for the occupancy tax, and it's 1 million and two. Commissioner Walker asked if County Governments retain any occupancy tax. Ms. Bell stated they did, and it's 3% off the first \$500,000 and 1% after that. Mr. Wooten asked about the interest in the availability fee.

Commissioner Ellis is not in favor of taking \$1.8 million from the general fund, agrees with the tipping fee for private haulers, and recommends sending another letter to the legislature regarding the increase in the household exemption cutoff. Does like sales tax on the ballot, if possible (tied to the school system and waste disposal), and wait one more year for the availability fee to see what happens.

Vice-Greene with the last draft because this is the least they can do, and is in support of sales tax being added to the ballot if possible.

Chairman Brown is in support of the quarter-cent sales tax, increasing tipping fees, pulling money out of the fund balance for increases to the COLA and education funding. Chairman Brown is in support of the original budget draft with the 2% increase, sales tax rate, and tipping fee. Chairman Brown thinks the health insurance should stay where it is currently, at an \$810 per employee per month rate.

Commissioner Garner is in support of the trash fee increase, bringing \$2.4 million to the budget to accommodate COLA, health insurance, and increase funding for schools and the community college. Commissioner Garner stated they should look into putting a tax on the ballot, possibly bringing in \$1.2 million in funds.

Commissioner Walker is in support of going up on the COLA, the school system, and the community college, and the trash fee for private haulers. Commissioner Walker thinks they should back off on health insurance to \$910 per employee per month and is in support of the sales tax increase being added to the ballot.

Mr. Wooten will find out if this can be on the ballot and let Commissioners know before Friday's budget presentation. Chairman Brown, Vice-Chair Greene, and Commissioner Walker agreed that the COLA and funding for the schools need to be at a 2% minimum, but limit this from being taken from the fund balance.

Vice-Chair Greene thanked Ms. Bell, Mr. Wooten, and Ms. Rampey (finance officer for McDowell County Public Schools) for what they do. Chairman Brown, Commissioner Garner, and Commissioner Walker thanked the boards in attendance and the partnership they have.

### **Adjournment**

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 6:38 pm, with a second from Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.