

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – June 15, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, June 15, 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; Alison Bell, Finance Director

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 11:30 am. Commissioner Walker led the group in prayer. Vice-Chair Greene led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Walker moved to approve the agenda with the addition of sales tax as item E under Other Business. Vice-Chair Greene seconded this motion. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Marion Area Fire Service District Request

Corey Presnell, Marion Fire Chief, presented the Marion Area Fire Service District Request. The request is for a .02 cent increase. Currently, they are at four employees per shift and have received recommendations from a study conducted in 2023 by the Fire Chief Consulting Group for seven employees per shift. The Marion Fire Department has had a 118% increase in calls as of 2026. This cost includes the benefits package, salary, and radio. The Marion Fire Department requested funding assistance

from the McDowell County Board of Commissioners for 50% of the cost associated with hiring three additional full-time firefighters, adding one firefighter to each 24-hour shift. The City of Marion has already approved funding for the remaining 50% of this Initiative. The request represents a critical investment in firefighter safety and emergency response effectiveness, and the long-term protection of citizens and property throughout the community.

Commissioner Walker added that it's important to staff departments to the best of their abilities and fully supports the need to provide a quick response to protect life and property. Commissioner Garner added that the call volume is increasing without an abundance of volunteers. Vice-Chair Greene asked if the .02 cent increase on the fire tax covers the County's 50% of the initiative, and Mr. Presnell added that this does. Commissioner Walker confirmed that this would take the employees on shift to five, working towards the 2023 study recommendations.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the .02 cent request for three new firemen to increase full-time staff on shift, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Drexel Property Rail Study

Mr. Wooten asked if this item could be moved to the next agenda item due to City staff attending the meeting. Mr. Wooten gave an overview of the Drexel Heritage Furniture factory, with which the County and City have an interlocal agreement. The City has been leading the cleanup for the past three years. The City has hosted public input sessions for this. NCDOT has reached out to ask communities along the future WNC Passenger Rail Corridor to express interest in a federal rail-oriented development study. The program would study the establishment of a station at the Drexel property and any associated adjacent development that could occur there, including commercial, residential, and more. The request is to support the City in applying and going 50/50 for funding for this if a match is required. The County's match would be \$20,000, handled with the economic development line item; the project would likely not initiate until Fiscal Year 2028. The local match is \$40,000 in total.

Vice-Chair Greene added that he'd love for passenger rail to return and Chairman Brown agreed this would be a decent investment for the City and the County.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the participation in the 50/50 local match due to funds being identified, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

*A RESOLUTION OF THE McDOWELL COUNTY BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS
ENDORING THE CITY OF MARION'S APPLICATION FOR THE PILOT
PROGRAM
FORTRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD) PLANNING AND
COMMITTING A LOCAL MATCH OF \$20,000*

WHEREAS, McDowell County is a body politic and corporate and political subdivision of the State of North Carolina; and

WHEREAS, the City of Marion is a municipal corporation and political subdivision of the State of North Carolina, located in McDowell County, and is eligible to apply for funding under the Federal Transit Administration FY 2026 Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning; and

WHEREAS, the City of Marion and McDowell County share a common interest in improving public transportation, land use planning, and economic development within the County; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners recognizes that any comprehensive or site specific planning work proposed for funding under this program must be associated with an eligible transit capital project, namely a new fixed guideway project or a core capacity improvement project as defined in Section 5309(a) of title 49, United States Code; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners has considered and understands that any comprehensive or site-specific planning funded through the program must examine ways to improve economic development and ridership, foster multimodal connectivity and accessibility, improve transit access for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, engage the private sector, identify infrastructure needs, and enable mixed-use development near transit stations; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Commissioners finds that endorsing this application and committing local match funding is reasonable and in the best interest of the County and its residents, complies with all applicable laws, and promotes the health, safety, and welfare of the community.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, BY THE McDOWELL COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. The McDowell County Board of Commissioners hereby endorses the City of

Marion's application to the Federal Transit Administration FY 2026 Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning and expresses its full support for the proposed planning effort.

Section 2. McDowell County hereby commits a local match contribution of twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) toward the required non-federal match share associated with the City of Marion's application, subject to appropriation by the Board of Commissioners in the applicable fiscal year budget.

Section 3. The County Manager is authorized to execute any documents, certifications, or correspondence necessary to evidence McDowell County's endorsement and match commitment in connection with this application.

Adopted this the 15th day of June, 2026.

Human Services Update

Sarah Brewer, Human Services Director, gave the monthly human services update and thanked the Board for attending the World Elder Abuse service earlier that morning. Mrs. Brewer covered the monthly meetings of critical cases. They'll be meeting with the state for the certification of a site visit for an adult day health program. They have recently developed a multidisciplinary team for adults. This is a group of law enforcement officers, emergency service staff, the adult protective services team, representatives from the state, and some community partners who help support vulnerable adults in the community. This group comes together to talk about problems and things that they're worried about in terms of keeping adults safe. They will meet monthly to talk about critical cases, problem-solve, and triage those cases where there is concern.

Commissioner Garner asked if Mrs. Brewer could give more details about why adult services are beneficial for community partners. Mrs. Brewer stated that it's a group that will come together and triage cases for services and will hopefully provide better outcomes for folks they're concerned about. Bringing together community partners will help problem-solve and support the person better. Mrs. Brewer asked if there were any questions regarding the MOU. Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve the MOU data, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Dawna Wilson gave an overview of energy programs provided by the Department of Social Services. LIEAP provides a one-time vendor payment, are only for heating, available from December 1st through March 31st. Eligibility requirements include being equal to or less than 130% of the current poverty level. CIP provides emergency energy assistance from July 1st through June 30th or until funds are exhausted. These programs help households experiencing a heating or cooling crisis.

Home visits are required for air conditioning assistance. The application process includes income guidelines that are equal to or less than 150% of the current poverty level. Contact the local department of social services for more information.

Commissioner Walker asked about the leftover funds being given back to the state. Mr. Wooten asked if funds could be used for outreach or advertising, and Ms. Wilson stated that there were no funds allocated for this. The Board thanked Ms. Wilson for her report.

FY 2027 Budget Public Hearing

Commissioner Walker made a motion to go into public hearing, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed. Mr. Wooten gave an overview of the County and City being required to hold a public hearing according to the NC Budget Fiscal Control Act. There were no public comments. Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to go out of public hearing, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

FY 2027 Budget Discussion

Mr. Wooten reminded the Board that they'd had budget discussions on May 28th, May 29th, and June 8th. Mr. Wooten heard recommendations from the Board on the COLA, education funding, and health insurance adjustments. Commissioner Walker asked for Mr. Wooten's original recommendation. With current revenues, the expectations the Board has are tough to meet without using fund balance appropriation. Most peers appropriate the fund balance to meet expectations. On the revenue side, it's been made clear that certain things are off the table, including a property tax increase and a solid waste availability fee.

Mr. Wooten asked for direction on two items, vehicle tax implemented for every registered vehicle (generating \$167,000) and early payment discount elimination (generating \$185,000). Commissioner Walker added that, given the uncertainty in Raleigh, he supports the recommendation to eliminate the early payment discount but does not agree with the vehicle tax on every registered vehicle. Vice-Chair Greene added that he was not on the Board when the decision for jail revenue was made. Mr. Greene asked to see the contract with an agreement and to discuss this with the Sheriff. Vice-Chair Greene asked that discussions be held with the Sheriff regarding this.

One item not in the draft budget ordinance was the tipping fee. The Board agreed by consensus to have private residential haulers pay the tipping fee because it's a private commercial business. (generating \$76,000). Chairman Brown asked that they look at the city and the municipalities. Chairman Brown is not for the \$7 vehicle tax or the early payment discount, but does agree with the tax on the tipping fee.

Vice-Chair Greene moved not to implement the vehicle tax at this time, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed. Vice Chair Greene

moved to eliminate the early payment discount, with a second from Commissioner Walker. By a 3-1 vote, the motion passed.

Yays:

Vice-Chair Greene

Commissioner Garner

Commissioner Walker

Nays:

Chairman Brown

Vice-Chair Greene moved to add the tipping fee for private haulers, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Mr. Wooten covered expenditures previously discussed, including the 2% COLA, 2% funding to education (MTCC and McDowell County Public Schools), \$1000 per month per employee for health insurance.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the 2% COLA for employees, 2% for the school system, 2% for the Community College, and to reduce insurance to \$910. Chairman Brown seconded the motion. Commissioner Walker requested an update demonstrating the 2%,2%,2% split with the \$910 insurance split, and the 1%,1%,1% with the appropriation from the general fund. Vice-Chair Greene stated that he would vote no to the motion due to the \$910 insurance section of the motion. Commissioner Garner and Vice-Chair Greene would agree to the motion if the \$910 insurance split was at the original \$1000. Mr. Wooten added that if the goal is to get to zero taken from the fund balance, this would be hard to do with the 2%, 2%, 2% allocations. By a vote of 2-2, the motion died.

Yays:

Chairman Brown

Commissioner Walker

Nays:

Vice-Chair Greene

Commissioner Garner

Chairman Brown made a motion to do 2% COLA,2% for the school system,2% for the community college, with the \$950 insurance split. Without a second, the motion died.

Fonta Flora Trail Project

Mr. Wooten presented the Fonta Flora Trail Project to the Board for approval. In 2024, the County pledged to support the local match for a minor extension of the Fonta Flora State Trail in Old Fort, primarily involving building a bridge over Curtis Creek. A \$500,000 State grant has been secured, contingent upon finalizing the local match. Total commitments from partners include \$100,000 from the TDA and \$88,000 from the Town of Old Fort, and the County has committed \$62,000 to be paid over several years. Project administration has become an issue because the original contracted trial coordinator is no longer available. The Friends of Fonta Flora State Trail (F3ST) have

offered to manage the project for a \$40,000 fee over two years. It is proposed that the Town and County share this expense, resulting in a County contribution of \$10,000 in both Year 1 and Year 2. This administrative cost is separate from the previously mentioned grant match.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the staff recommendation to approve the Curtis Creek Trail Project proposal since funds had already been appropriated, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. Vice-Chair Greene confirmed that this money is coming from the local match from other grants. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Administrative and Budget Items

Mr. Wooten covered the administrative and budget items for approval. Mr. Wooten presented the Babe Ruth All-Star Gate Fee Waiver and Building Inspection Fee matter. The Babe Ruth organization has asked to keep the gate revenue from the upcoming tournament games to cover the expenses of the teams playing in the All-Star tournaments. Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the request based on staff's recommendation, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

England Builders has requested a permit fee reduction per the referenced statute. This reflects back on the permit timeliness issue that is being addressed through new staff and improvement processes. Vice-Chair Greene moved that they grant the fee request, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

There is one project ordinance amendment for the Carson House/Recreation Center project as well as several budget amendments:

GF 81 - Transfers between line items under \$3,000

GF 82 - Transfers between line items in Facility Maintenance

GF 83 - Allocates revenue for the Sheriff's Office

GF 84 - Transfers between line items at DSS

GF 85 - Allocate revenue for Transit

GF 86 - Allocates revenue for Rescue Squad billing

GF 87 - Allocates a NC OEMS grant for Emergency Services

GF 88 - Allocates a grant for the football program

GF 89 - Allocates reserved funds and transfers between line items at the Senior Center

OpioidF2 - Appropriates prior year opioid funding for the substance use disorder program under Emergency Services

SP6 - Amends the school project fund

ENT6 - Allocates revenue for increased disposal expense in the Waste Enterprise fund

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to approve the budget amendments as presented, with a second from Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Sales Tax Item

Commissioner Walker stated that the Board voted recently to have the quarter-cent sales tax added to the ballot. Commissioner Walker discussed the need for a third-party to educate the public for a better model for success. Five months of education would need to take place, and the last time this was included on the ballot, it was not successful. The board has pushed tax-reform resolutions to Raleigh. Commissioner Walker made a motion to not have this matter on the ballot until a third party comes forward to support this being included on the ballot. Chairman Brown seconded this motion for discussion. Chairman Brown added that this would allow the public to vote; however, feedback from the public leads him to believe this will be voted down. Vice-Greene added that he's maintaining his position on this and supports putting this on the ballot to let the public decide. Commissioner Garner added that she voted yes to bring in revenue and for the purpose of balancing the budget and maintaining services for the community. Mr. Wooten added, from a technical legal standpoint, that the next opportunity to have this on the ballot would be in 2028. By a vote of 2-2, the motion died.

Yays:

Chairman Brown

Commissioner Walker

Nays:

Vice-Chair Greene

Commissioner Garner

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion to adopt a resolution for the sales tax to be added to the November ballot, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 2-2, the motion died.

Yays:

Vice-Chair Greene

Commissioner Garner

Nays:

Chairman Brown

Commissioner Walker

Closed Session [NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (6)]

Commissioner Walker made a motion to go into closed session pursuant to [NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (6)] at 12:55 pm, with a seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed. Commissioner Garner made a motion to go out of closed session at 1:35 pm, with a second from Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed.

Adjournment

Commissioner Greene made a motion to adjourn at 1:36 pm, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 3-0, the motion passed