

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL SESSION – June 23, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in special session on Tuesday, June 23, 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, Patrick Ellis

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 10:02 am.

FY 2026 Budget Amendments

Mr. Wooten presented the current year's budget amendments:

- GF 90 - Sheriff's Office - Allocate revenue due to estimated cost
- GF 91 - DSS - Allocate revenue due to estimated cost
- GF 92 - Various - Allocate revenue due to anticipated salary accruals
- GF 93 - Tax and Tag Offices - Allocate revenue due to anticipated expenses
- GF 94 - Public Services Waste - Allocate revenue due to anticipated Fuel and Maintenance costs
- GF 95 - Various - Transfer between line items under \$3,000
- FD2 - Fire and Rescue Districts - Allocate estimated property tax collections between the districts

FD3 - Fire and Rescue Districts - Allocate estimated sales tax collections between the districts

ENT7 - Enterprise Fund (Waste) - Allocate revenue and transfer between line items

Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the amendments as presented, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

FY 2027 Budget Discussion

Mr. Wooten requested guidance on the cost-of-living adjustment for employees, funding increases to grant the school system and community college, and what to budget per month per employee for health insurance.

Employee cost-of-living adjustment:

- 1 or 2 percent. The working
- ordinance has a 2 percent adjustment, which equates to \$468,717.
- 2% COLA was based on recommendations given at the time, and since there has been continued discussion.

Funding increases to be granted to the school system and college:

- 1 or 2 percent increase
- The working ordinance has a 2 percent increase, which equates to \$216,720 for the school system and \$25,699 for the college.

What to budget per employee per month for employee health insurance:

- The current ordinance sets that number at \$1,000.
- Each \$100 of PEPM allocation equals \$428,400.

Commissioner Walker asked if they could drop the insurance rate to \$910 for the cost savings. Ms. Bell added that, of the three buckets, the insurance cost would be allocated later in the year anyway, based on data from previous years. Commissioner Walker asked what 1% would amount to for the raise, and Mr. Wooten added that it would be approximately \$230,000. Commissioner Walker asked about raising the COLA to 3%, which would add \$230,000. Commissioner Walker suggested raising the COLA to 3%, with the school system allocation remaining the same, and lowering insurance rates based on what could happen in the revaluation process and based on General Assembly discussion.

Commissioner Walker made a motion to raise the COLA for employees to 3% and reduce the proposed allocation for health insurance to \$910. Chairman Brown seconded the motion. Commissioner Ellis added that lowering health insurance is similar to taking out a loan, and they need to be transparent to the public. Commissioner Ellis is not in favor of this motion. Vice-Chair Greene added that he does not support the motion due

to discussions with the finance director and Mr. Wooten regarding health insurance. By a 3-2 vote, the motion does not pass.

Yays:

Chairman Brown

Commissioner Walker

Nays:

Vice-Chair Greene

Commissioner Garner

Commissioner Ellis

Vice-Chair Greene asked what the school system's fund balance is, and Commissioner Walker added that the School System went into the fund balance last year and will likely do the same this year. Vice-Chair Greene added that he'll stay with 2% for the schools as long as insurance stays at \$1000 and the COLA stays at 2%. Commissioner Ellis asked what they could do differently to reduce expenses and protect the general fund balance, and what they could do to protect County services. Commissioner Walker added that they might need to dip into the fund balance to make ends meet. Vice-Chair Greene stated that they need to figure out a way to add money back into the fund balance in case of emergency. Commissioner Ellis asked if they've gone through operating expenses to see what they cut and suggested cutting operating expenses to maintain services. Commissioner Garner asked how a fund balance was built, and Ms. Bell stated that it's built when money is brought in above what is expended.

Vice-Chair Greene asked about salaries and the benefits included in the line items, and asked about the freeze on the Commissioners' salaries and whether it was reflected in the line item. Ms. Bell will check on this and get back to the Board. The Economic Development line item is for the final payment for the hotel, and discussions are underway with the developer to amend the incentive agreement to allow a lending institution to be the first lienholder. Chairman Brown asked what was left on the universal building, and Ms. Bell replied that 2 years were left.

Vice-Chair Greene moved to stay with 2% COLA, 2% schools, and \$1000 on insurance. There were no seconds to this motion.

Commissioner Garner asked if a fee were passed next year, how this would affect the fund balance. This could replace the loss from fund balance, but it's possible that this would help fund balance grow if you bring in funds from the enterprise fund. The waste expense would potentially be lower. If you were to pass a fee now, you would not be appropriating funds directly. Commissioner Garner added that the elderly could be exempt from the fees.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to keep COLA at 2%, remove funding increase for the school system and college, and keep insurance at \$1000. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Walker for discussion. Clarification on holding the school system rate flat. Commissioner Ellis discussed adding a sales tax increase to the ballot and allocating part of the sales tax increase to the school system and some to waste collection. Commissioner Ellis suggested they see what happens with the sales tax on the ballot and then increase fees if this is not sufficient. This would have a fund

balance removal calculation of roughly \$630,000, while continuing to evaluate other options. Commissioner Garner asked how much of an increase this motion would give to the schools, and Commissioner Walker added that this would be held flat, with nothing taken away. By a 4-1 vote, the motion did not pass.

Yay:	Nay:
Commissioner Ellis	Vice-Chair Greene
	Commissioner Walker
	Commissioner Brown
	Commissioner Garner

Commissioner Ellis is planning on attending PTO/PTA meetings to explain why the quarter-cent increase would be beneficial.

Vice-Chair Greene made a motion for the 2% COLA, 1% to college and schools, and the insurance at \$1000. Commissioner Walker seconded for discussion purposes. This would be a \$750,000 fund balance appropriation. By a 3-2 vote, the motion passed.

Yay:	Nay:
Chairman Brown	Commissioner Garner
Vice-Chair Greene	Commissioner Walker
Commissioner Ellis	

Mr. Wooten stated that he'd take the suggestions and make changes to the budget ordinance. This motion can be changed until its adoption. The Board agreed they needed to meet one more time before adopting the budget and decided on Monday the 29th, at 5:00 pm.

Recess

Commissioner Ellis moved to recess the meeting until Monday, June 29th, at 5:00 pm, with a second from Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passes.