

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – June 8, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, June 8, 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; Fred Coats, County Attorney; Marlan Brinkley, Library Director; Alison Bell, Finance Director

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. Commissioner Walker led the group in prayer. Commissioner Ellis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Walker moved to approve the May 11th and May 18th regular session minutes and the May 14th, May 26th, and 29th special session minutes with a second from Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Walker moved to approve the agenda with the addition of an update on the animal shelter and a closed session. Commissioner Ellis seconded this motion. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

McDowell Library Summer Program

Marlan Brinkley gave an update on the library's summer reading program, a nationwide initiative offered by all public libraries. It's designed to encourage reading and lifelong learning through reading challenges, educational programs, special guest presenters, and family-friendly events throughout the summer months. Summer programs prevent summer learning loss, encourage lifelong learning, and offer free family activities. This year's Summer Reading Program is called Unearth A Story. By encouraging children to read regularly and participate in educational activities, libraries help keep those skills sharp so students are ready to succeed when school begins again in August. Over the years, the summer reading program has grown into much more than that. Today, it is a community-wide program that includes children, teens, and adults. They want people of all ages to discover new interests, stay connected with books and learning, and engage with their library throughout the summer.

Between the Marion and Old Fort locations, they have nearly 50 children's Programs planned throughout June and July. One event Mr. Brinkley highlighted was in partnership with the Barefoot Baby Foundation, Kula, and the Lake James State Park. On Saturday, June 13th, at the beach area of the park, they'll be helping host a free family event featuring activities like story walks, sand castle building competitions, free food, and opportunities for families to connect and learn together outdoors.

They'll be concluding the summer programming for kids on July 30th with the Digory Diggers Dino Show featuring dinosaur puppets ranging from small creatures to adult-sized dinosaurs. For teens and adults, there are several exciting opportunities as well. On July 21st, visiting artist Michael Albert will lead a program showcasing his unique collage artwork created from everyday items such as cereal boxes and product packaging. They're also offering two introductory genealogy workshops on June 26 and July 24th, helping participants learn how to research and discover their own family histories.

Mr. Brinkley highlighted the community impact in 2025, with 496 registered, 1119 reading logs returned, and 8956 hours read. Mr. Brinkley thanked community partners, the Board, local businesses, and their employees for spending months crafting library programs. Chairman Brown added that folks should head to the library to see the new renovations, outreach for children, and the bookmobile. Commissioner Garner thanked Mr. Brinkley for all he did.

Water System Project Updates

Mr. Wooten gave an update on the water system projects. There have been several conversations with the City leadership regarding our water Purchase agreement. It has been suggested that the current agreement be kept in place, with perhaps some minor tweaks, to negotiate a new document over the next year that addresses the City's concerns as well as the new Providence Hill system. The City has tabled the 60% increase in the block grant fee.

Nebo

- The East End Project began on August 4. This project is scheduled to be completed in June 2026. Some sections of the work are completed and certified. The total customer count should be around 100 when all the work is complete.
- Nebo Phases 2 A & B are complete.
- The small extension project near Exit 90 is more or less ready to bid. The grant consultant states that they believe all of the environmental reviews are complete.
- Phase 3 (Randolph Road) will start construction within the next month or so. The complicating factor is that the contractor working on East End was also the successful bidder on this project, so they will need to work to coordinate the work on two projects at once.
- A grant/small loan combination was received for the construction of a water storage tank somewhere on the Nebo system. A RFQ for engineering services will be posted in the next few months.

Providence Area/West Marion Elementary Area

- The engineer has provided the 90% plans to staff for review.
- The environmental and historical reviews are complete.
- Additional funds have been received under the State Revolving Fund program through the NC DEQ Division of Water Infrastructure for the Marler and Zion Hill Road segments.

Commissioner Walker asked when the current contract with the City expires, and Mr. Wooten added that the contract expires in December of 2027. Vice-Chair Greene asked if they've explored the cost to extend lines from Old Fort to the Greenlee Area. Mr. Wooten provided that there have been preliminary evaluations of feasibility, but no dollar amount has been provided. Commissioner Ellis asked if the grant money already awarded could be held for the time frame that it will take for the City's AIA study to be completed. Mr. Wooten does not think they can hold the money for that long, but he could ask. Mr. Wooten added that he will communicate their concerns about this issue.

Animal Shelter Update

Mr. Wooten gave an update on the animal shelter. Counties are, more or less, required to have rabies control, but almost by default, required to have an animal shelter. Mr. Wooten is not aware of a County similar in size to McDowell that doesn't have at least one that they operate or have a contractual agreement to do so. The current building was constructed in 1980 when the population was roughly 15,000.

Mr. Wooten indicated that they've spent around a year and a half working to identify County-owned property available for a new facility. They've looked at 226 South, which had a site, but it was found to be unsuitable. Staff has found a potential site on Spaulding Road near the law enforcement center. The one funding source staff is looking at keeps pushing the application deadline back. This funding source is through the Helene Relief Program, called a community development block grant-disaster

recovery. The Board has authorized the application for a 911 center, an expansion to our Old Fort Senior Center, and an animal shelter. Out of the three, the animal shelter will likely have the toughest time with funding success. Unless the Board directs otherwise, staff plans to try for other funding sources, whether it's federal, state, or private funding. The application for the Helene Disaster Recovery grant is due July 8th.

Commissioner Board and Committee Appointments

There was one application for the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council. William Chapman applied to fill one of three longstanding commissioner-appointed vacancies on the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council. Commissioner Walker made a motion to suspend the first reading for the application since it's a longstanding vacancy. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Budget Update and Approvals

Mr. Wooten noted that there was a budget workshop at 4:00 pm and this workshop would continue after the conclusion of the closed session, as requested. The budget public hearing will be on June 15th at 11:30 am and written comments can be sent to the clerk for the Commissioner's review. The budget must be adopted no later than June 30th.

Mr. Wooten presented the project ordinances and budget amendments to the Board for approval. Project Ordinances include the Fonta Flora Trail Project Amendment 2, USDA Emergency Watershed Protection Program, and Streamflow Rehabilitation Assistance Program (StRAP #2).

Budget Amendments:

- GF 68 - Transfer between line items \$3,000 and under
- GF 69 - Appropriate funds to cover potential audit fees and collection fees
- GF 70 - Appropriate reserved Library funds for parking lot and other improvements
- GF 71 - Appropriate revenue for Animal Services expenditures
- GF 72 - Appropriate revenue and transfer between line items at the Sheriff's Office
- GF 73 - Appropriate revenue and transfer between line items in Emergency Services
- GF 74 - Appropriate revenue and transfer between line items in DSS
- GF 75 - Appropriate revenue for budget needs at the Senior Center
- GF 76 - Transfer between line items at Parks and Recreation
- GF 77 - Records projected Subscription-Based Information Technology Arrangement (SBITA) and lease liability
- GF 78 - Appropriate inmate housing revenue for Sheriff's Office expense
- GF 79 - Transfers funds between line items in Parks and Recreation

GF 80 - Transfers between line items for salary and benefit expenditures
DS1 - Appropriate fund balance for debt payments
SP5 - Amends the school project fund
ENT5 - Transfers between line items in the Waste Enterprise fund

Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the budget items, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Administrative Items for Review and Approval

Mr. Wooten presented the administrative items for review and approval. EMS Transport Write-offs totaled \$49,923.87 of fees requested to be released, and there were Leak Write-offs for \$66.27, \$135.22, \$34.62, and \$37.80. Mr. Wooten presented a request on behalf of Transit Director Jason Hollifield for approval of the annual update for the system's annual System Safety Plan. The plan has been adopted by the Transportation Advisory Board.

Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the administrative items, and this was seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed

Property Tax Releases, Refunds, and Discoveries

Mr. Wooten presented the property tax releases, refunds, and discoveries to the Board for approval.

Releases Over \$100: \$577.77
Releases Under \$100: \$0
Refunds: \$0
Motor Vehicle Refunds: \$3,181.09
Discoveries: \$305.82

Commissioner Walker made a motion to approve the property tax releases, refunds, and discoveries as presented, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Citizen Comment

Jerry Greene on the Noise Ordinance and Russel Davenport on bad roads.

Commissioner/Staff Reports and Communications

Commissioner Ellis made a motion for staff to provide a monthly report on the permitting department, including any permits that are outside the General Statute timeline, and to receive a report stating the reason for the delay. This motion was seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to remove the commissioner's stipend raise from the annual COLA increase this year so that Commissioners can vote on an annual basis if they'd like to increase the stipend, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to put the quarter-cent sales tax on the ballot due to the budget constraints they're experiencing, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Garner made a motion to implement the \$120 fee for trash disposal, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 2-3, the motion did not pass.

Yays:

Commissioner Garner
Commissioner Ellis

Nays:

Chairman Brown
Commissioner Walker
Vice-Chair Greene

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

Commissioner Walker made a motion to go into closed session pursuant to G.S. 143-318.11.18 (a)(6) at 5:41 pm, with a second by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed. At 6:08 pm, the Board came out of closed session.

Budget Discussion

Mr. Wooten recalled the two items included in the budget presentation on May 29th, one being a revenue and one being an expense. The first was the Registered Motor Vehicle fee of \$7 assessed to every registered motor vehicle, not including car lots. Reports received from the state show 50,000 registered vehicles in McDowell County. This fee would take a six-month lead time to implement if adopted.

Mr. Wooten moved on to the early payment 1% discount that taxpayers receive in the months of July and August. Some counties in North Carolina do not provide a discount for the months of July and August, and the incentive for McDowell County to continue this is not there like it used to be in the past. Commissioner Walker asked how many Counties don't provide this discount, but this discount is not currently tracked by the NCACC. If the County were to reduce or eliminate this discount, this would allocate \$185,000. Mr. Wooten provided these options to the Board as they contemplated the budget process. If both of the options mentioned were eliminated, \$352,000 would need to be made up for somewhere else.

The Board agreed they needed time to think this over before discussing further. Commissioner Ellis added that they don't want to pull from the fund balance every year around budget time, and he'd like to give a higher than 1% COLA without cutting

services from emergency services and safety. Commissioner Walker asked for a 5-year history of the amount budgeted and the amount collected.

Commissioner Garner added that she'd like to explain a motion she made in the budget workshop. \$4.6 million dollars go to trash, and the County collects \$2.6 million on the scales. They've also discussed not charging the \$120 fee for low-income families, the elderly, and veterans. Without charging these groups, this will still bring in over two million in revenue. This would allow a higher COLA increase for employees, with \$120 fee and not charging low income families, veterans, and the disabled. Commissioner Garner added that she's not trying to cause hardship on the community but this would allow for a balanced budget, aid in retaining employees, recruiting employees, and helping employees. Commissioner Garner added that she wanted the community to know exactly where she was coming from by making the \$10 monthly trash fee motion (totaling \$120 yearly).

Adjournment

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 6:22, seconded by Commissioner Walker. By a vote of 5-0, the motion passed