

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
MCDOWELL COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR SESSION – July 13, 2026**

Assembly

The McDowell County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, July 13, 2026, in the Commissioners' Board Room, 69 N. Main Street, Marion, NC.

Members Present

Chairman, Tony Brown; Vice-Chair, Lynn Greene; Patrick Ellis; and Trisha Garner

Members Absent

David Walker

Others Present

Ashley Wooten, County Manager; Madalyn Robinson, Clerk to the Board; Fred Coats, County Attorney; Sarah Brewer, Human Services Director; Ricky Buchanan, McDowell County Sheriff

Call to Order

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. Vice-Chair Greene led the group in prayer. Commissioner Garner led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Ellis moved to approve the June 8th and June 15th regular session minutes and the June 23rd, 29th, and 30th special session minutes with a second from Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Wooten requested an additional item under new business related to incoming Sheriff Mace (item F) and the addition of the fee adjustments under Old Business (item A). Commissioner Ellis amended the motion to include additions as requested by Mr. Wooten. Vice-Chair Greene seconded the motion. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Human Services Update

Sarah Brewer gave the monthly Human Services update and asked if the Board had any questions regarding the MOU data, and they did not. Mrs. Brewer gave the Board information regarding teen suicide prevention and understanding the impact in McDowell County. McDowell County has seen a steady increase in teen suicides and suicide attempts. Every attempt and loss affect families, schools, and communities. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for NC Youth ages 10-18, with about 65% being male. Since April 2024, McDowell DSS screened 21 reports involving teen suicide attempts. Many of these reports involve teens aged 13–16 years old. Every week in June and July 2026, DSS has received at least one report of a teen suicide attempt in McDowell County.

Mrs. Brewer has formed a McDowell County Teen Suicide Prevention Team, in which County leaders meet for a common purpose to discuss risk factors, warning signs, and commonalities in these cases and develop solution-focused planning strategies. Risk factors include access to social media posts encouraging suicide, access to substances or alcohol, caregivers uneducated or unaware of the risks of social media, bullying, and access to firearms. Warning signs include talking about death, being withdrawn, family struggles, and social media posts. Protective factors that can provide support include caring adults, connection to schools, mental health support, and healthy relationships providing someone to speak up to. The McDowell County Teen Suicide Prevention Team had its initial meeting on July 2nd, 2026, and is made up of representatives from Marion Police Department, McDowell County Sheriff's Office, DSS, and McDowell County Public Schools. There are plans to include EMS, DJJ, churches, and other community partners in the future. McDowell County Teen Suicide Prevention Awareness Day is in April 2027 (Save our kids...speak up- reach out). The team is planning to launch a social media campaign, implement data collection, and utilize the NC SAFE Program providing gun locks to families.

Chairman Brown thanked Mrs. Brewer for her presentation and added that this is an important issue to act on, and welcomed the opportunity to help out with this. Commissioner Garner added that the only hope for young people is the Lord, and younger people in the community seem to be struggling with this issue. Commissioner Garner added that she serves on JCPC and they've provided gun locks for every child to take home at New Manna, and suggested looking into how to provide these to the public schools. The Board thanked Mrs. Brewer for her presentation and information provided to help the community.

Recognition of Sheriff Ricky Buchanan's Retirement

Chairman Brown recognized Sheriff Ricky Buchanan for his service as Sheriff in McDowell County and ensuring the safety of McDowell County residents.

Sheriff Ricky Buchanan will be retiring July 31st after eight years as sheriff and quite a bit more in law enforcement. Commissioner Ellis made a motion to approve the resolution, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed. The board adopted the resolution authorizing the donation of his badge and the sale for \$1 of his sidearm.

Chairman Brown presented the resolution for Sheriff Buchanan and each Commissioner, and Mr. Wooten shared their thanks and appreciation for Sheriff Buchanan's service. Sheriff Buchanan highlighted how much of an honor it is to serve as the Sheriff of McDowell County and thanked his staff and the Board for their support through the years.

RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING SALE OF COUNTY OWNED PROPERTY

WHEREAS, The County of McDowell owns certain items of personal property that has become surplus for its current needs; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina General Statute § 20-187.2 permits the County to donate the badge worn by personnel upon their retirement or death and the sale of the side arm for \$1.00; and

WHEREAS, Sheriff Ricky Buchanan has requested to receive his service badge and purchase his side arm for \$1.00 upon his retirement.

Glock 43x

Serial Number CACS760

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of McDowell County that: The Board of Commissioners authorizes the donation of the service badge and the sale of the side arm to Sheriff Ricky Buchanan for \$1.00.

This resolution shall become effective upon adoption.

ADOPTED this the 13th day of July, 2026.

County Water System Project Updates

Mr. Wooten presented the water system updates and the fee adjustments to the Board. There was an omission in the fee schedule. The monthly fee for residential use will be changed. The bulk rate, the commercial, and the industrial/institutional will remain the same as the base fee. The Board approved some adjustments to the fee schedule when adopting the budget, and Mr. Wooten reprinted the page specific to water and a water department. There was an omission in the fee schedule as it relates to commercial, industrial, and institutional base fee. The \$7.80 per thousand is a usage-based fee. Staff recommends the bulk rate down through the institutional, which are currently \$25 a month, would increase those to \$35, being consistent with the increase that we had to pass on to residential. Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the

fee increase as presented, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

There have been some preliminary conversations with Town and City about establishing a waterline interconnection between the Town and City's water system along US 70 between the two existing systems. There may be enough County-held funds to construct the line, but it would be better to explore funding opportunities to ensure there is enough to complete the work. Commissioner Ellis made a motion to pursue funding for the interconnection and to provide updates to the Board, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed

Lease of County Property by McDowell Tech

Mr. Wooten presented the lease for the County property. Mr. Wooten recalled that MTCC President Kelley had previously briefed the Board on a proposal to lease approximately 3 acres from the County at the location of the Public Safety Firing Range. This range has been in operation for around 20 years. A formal lease would allow for the construction of support buildings on the site. The County's commitment to the project would be the land and a commitment to provide domestic water to the site for restrooms. Mr. Wooten noted that there are leftover American Rescue Plan funds that should cover the water line cost. The lease has been sent to MTCC and the County attorney for review.

Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the lease, seconded by Commissioner Ellis. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

County Operations Evaluation Process

Mr. Wooten presented the County Operations Evaluation process. Preliminary conversations with NCACC have taken place to request a part-time or full-time strategic project coordinator to evaluate County operations. There is an ongoing evaluation of expenditures and processes to ensure that wise spending decisions are made and also that the most efficient and suitable processes are in place. The request is pending, but it is expected that a Coordinator will be able to assist with evaluating contracted services vs. utilization of County staff, evaluating County benefit programs such as the self-insurance plan, identifying surplus real and personal property, and evaluating energy efficiency improvements. Commissioner Ellis made a motion to get a strategic project coordinator full-time if possible, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Downtown County Property Rezoning

Mr. Wooten covered the downtown County property rezoning project. Mr. Wooten recalled last fall, when the Board approved the submission of a grant to the NC Department of Commerce's Rural Downtown Economic Development program to make various improvements to the Recreation Center on Academy Street. The feedback from

Commerce staff on the application was positive; however, the grant reviewers realized after the grant was submitted that the Recreation Center is within the City of Marion's Downtown Overlay district and is not zoned C-1. These two distinctions disqualified the grant. Staff has had conversations with City of Marion staff since that time to determine how to rezone the property. Mr. Wooten recommended submitting a formal request to the City of Marion to rezone both the Recreation Center property and the Library property to C-1 and downtown overlay. Mr. Wooten discussed conversations with City staff about spot zoning.

Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the formal request for rezoning, seconded by Commissioner Garner. Commissioner Ellis would prefer to obtain the rezoning via spot zoning to limit pressure on neighboring property owners. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Budget Updates and Approvals

Mr. Wooten presented the budget updates and approvals to the Board.

There are two budget amendments for FY 2027:

GF 1 - Allocates loan proceeds for a garbage truck.

GF 2 - Allocates designated fund balance for Library repairs and renovations

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to accept the budget items as presented, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Administrative Items for Review and Approval

Mr. Wooten presented the Administrative Items for review and approval. EMS Transport Write-offs were presented with a total of \$70,488.84 of fees requested to be released. Leak Write-offs were presented for totals of \$41.86, \$54.81, \$46.00, \$60.00, \$138.09, \$89.92, \$65.29, \$70.93, \$85.97, \$255.00. Mr. Wooten presented the Opioid Authorization Resolution, which formally authorizes the spending of opioid settlement funding on the plans approved several weeks ago. Commissioner Ellis made a motion to accept the administrative items as presented, seconded by Vice-Chair Greene. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

A RESOLUTION BY THE COUNTY OF McDOWELL TO DIRECT THE EXPENDITURE OF OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS

WHEREAS McDowell County has joined national settlement agreements with companies engaged in the manufacturing, distribution, and dispensing of opioids, including settlements with drug distributors Cardinal, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen, and the drug maker Johnson & Johnson and its subsidiary JanssenPharmaceuticals;

WHEREAS the allocation, use, and reporting of funds stemming from these national settlement agreements and certain bankruptcy resolutions ("Opioid Settlement Funds") are governed by the Memorandum of Agreement Between the State of North Carolina and Local Governments on Proceeds Relating to the Settlement of Opioid Litigation ("MOA")

WHEREAS McDowell County has received Opioid Settlement Funds pursuant to these national settlement agreements and deposited the Opioid Settlement Funds in a separate special revenue fund as required by section D of the MOA; WHEREAS section E.6 of the MOA states:

E.6 Process for drawing from special revenue funds.

a. Budget item or resolution required, Opioid Settlement Funds can be used for purposes when the Governing Body includes in its budget or passes a separate resolution authorizing the expenditure of a stated amount of Opioid Settlement Funds for that purpose or those purposes during a specified period of time.

b. Budget item or resolution details. The budget or resolution should (i) indicate that it is an authorization for expenditure of opioid settlement funds; (ii) state the specific strategy or strategies the county or municipality intends to fund pursuant to option A or option B, using the item letter and/or number in Exhibit A or Exhibit B to identify each funded strategy, and (iii) state the amount dedicated to each strategy for a stated period of time.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that McDowell County authorizes the

expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds as follows:

1. First strategy authorized

a. Name of strategy: Evidence-Based Addiction Treatment

b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A.

c. Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 2

d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00

e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date: July 1, 2026 through End date: June 30, 2027

f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support the expansion of comprehensive, evidence-based addiction treatment services for individuals with opioid use disorder and other substance use disorders in McDowell County. Services will include low-barrier access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT), behavioral health counseling, care coordination, recovery support, and outreach to individuals who may otherwise experience barriers to treatment. Funding will also assist with connecting patients to community resources and improving continuity of care to promote long-term recovery and reduce opioid-related overdose deaths.

*g. **Provider:** High Country Community Health*

*2. **Second strategy authorized***

*a. **Name of strategy:** Recovery Support Services*

b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A.

c. Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3

- d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00
- e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:
Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027

f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support the continuation of an embedded Certified Peer Support Specialist within the Marion Police Department to assist law enforcement officers when responding to substance use and behavioral health-related incidents. The Peer Support Specialist will provide crisis intervention, post-overdose follow-up, recovery planning, resource navigation, and referrals to treatment and community services. The program is designed to reduce repeat emergency calls, increase engagement in treatment, and improve outcomes for individuals affected by substance use disorders.

- g. **Provider:** City of Marion Police Department

3. Third strategy authorized

- a. **Name of strategy:** Recovery Housing
- b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A.
- c. Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 5
- d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00
- e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:
Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027

f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support recovery housing and recovery support services for individuals affected by substance use disorders who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Services will include safe recovery housing, case management, recovery coaching, transportation assistance, life skills development, employment readiness, and linkage to behavioral health, medical care, and other community resources. The program seeks to improve housing stability, strengthen recovery, and reduce the likelihood of relapses and overdose.

- g. **Provider:** Mission Ministries Alliance

4. Fourth strategy authorized

- a. **Name of strategy:** Evidenced-Based Addiction Treatment
- b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A.
- c. Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 2
- d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00
- e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:
Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027

f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will expand access to

evidence-based substance use disorder treatment by increasing the availability of medication-assisted treatment, outpatient counseling, peer recovery support, and recovery-focused case management. Services will address barriers such as transportation, access to care, and treatment engagement while providing comprehensive clinical services that promote recovery, reduce opioid misuse, and improve overall health outcomes for McDowell County residents.

*g. **Provider:** McLeod Centers for Wellbeing*

S. Fifth strategy authorized

*a. **Name of strategy:** Recovery Support Services*

b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A.

c. Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3

d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$50,000.00

e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027

f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support recovery support services through care coordination, benefits navigation, peer support, and case management for individuals with substance use disorders. Services will assist participants

in accessing healthcare, behavioral health treatment, employment assistance, housing resources, transportation, and other recovery supports necessary to promote long-term recovery and improve overall quality of life.

*g. **Provider:** West Marion, Inc. I MATCH*

6. Sixth strategy authorized

*a. **Name of strategy:** Evidence-Based Addiction Treatment*

b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A.

c. Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 2

d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$18,750.00

e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027

f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support evidence-based outpatient counseling and recovery support services for individuals affected by opioid and substance use disorders. Services will include individual counseling, behavioral health treatment, recovery planning, outreach, referrals to community resources, and coordination with healthcare providers and community partners to improve access to treatment, increase engagement in recovery services, and reduce the impact of substance use disorders within McDowell County.

*g. **Provider:** CareNet Counseling of Marion*

7. Seventh strategy authorized

*a. **Name of strategy:** Collaborative Strategic Planning*

b. Strategy is included in Exhibit A.

c. Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 1

d. Amount authorized for this strategy: \$134,058.00

e. Period of time during which expenditure may take place:

Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027

f. Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support the County's Substance Use Disorder Coordinator responsible for oversight of the Opioid Settlement Program, grant administration, community partnerships, reporting, compliance, and implementation of opioid abatement initiatives.

*g. **Provider:** McDowell County Emergency Services*

8. Eighth strategy authorized

*a. **Name of strategy:** Recovery Support Services*

b. *Strategy is included in Exhibit A.*
c. *Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3*
d. *Amount authorized for this strategy: \$103,979.00*
e. *Period of time during which expenditure may take place:*
Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027
f. *Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support a Certified Peer Support Specialist providing post-overdose follow-up, outreach, recovery coaching, care coordination, and linkage to treatment and recovery services.*

g. **Provider:** McDowell County Emergency Services

9. Ninth strategy authorized

a. **Name of strategy:** Recovery Support Services

b. *Strategy is included in Exhibit A.*

c. *Item number in Exhibit A to the MOA: 3*

d. *Amount authorized for this strategy: \$90,810.00*

e. *Period of time during which expenditure may take place:*

Start date July 1, 2026 through End date June 30, 2027

f. *Description of the program, project, or activity: Funding will support a Care Navigator coordinating behavioral health services, transportation, benefits, housing resources, referrals, and recovery support for individuals affected by opioid use disorder.*

g. **Provider:** McDowell County Emergency Services

The total dollar amount of Opioid Settlement Funds appropriated across the above-named and authorized strategies is \$597,597.00.

Adopted this 1st day of July 2026.

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: \$409.81

Motor Vehicle Refunds: \$1755.11

Discoveries: \$0

Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the tax matters, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

New Sheriff Item Related to Incoming Sheriff Mace

Mr. Wooten spoke with incoming Sheriff Mace and Sheriff Buchanan about the transition between retirements. Sheriff Buchanan will retire at midnight on July 31st. Chief Deputy Mace will assume the powers and responsibilities at that time as acting Sheriff. The executive committee of the office-holders party advances the nomination that the Board shall accept. A special meeting will be held Monday, August 10th at 8 am to formally appoint and swear in incoming Sheriff Mace. Between midnight on July 31st and August 10th, Chief Deputy Mace will be acting as Sheriff, and Mr. Wooten requested that he be bonded at the statutory maximum of \$25,000 on August 1st. Vice-Chair Greene moved to approve the Sheriff's bond as presented, seconded by Commissioner Garner. 4-0, motion passed.

Citizen Comment

None

Commissioner/Staff Reports and Communication

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to bring the issue of data centers to the Planning Board due to concerns regarding power, noise, and water consumption and requested guidance from the Planning Board on this matter. This motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Greene, and with a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.

Commissioner Ellis noted that the Board has decided to send the state the sales tax increase of .25 cent and Commissioner Ellis asked that staff make Jake Johnson, Dudley Greene, and Warren Daniels aware and support this matter. Commissioner Ellis asked staff to advise on potential uses for the percentage going to the school system, college, and solid waste from this sales-tax increase if passed.

Mr. Wooten asked if the Board would be comfortable cancelling the 11:30 am meeting, and the Board agreed by consensus.

Adjournment

Commissioner Ellis made a motion to adjourn at 5:54 pm, seconded by Commissioner Garner. By a vote of 4-0, the motion passed.