

MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MARCH 14, 2017
MINUTES

Chairman Tate called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance. All Board Members (with the exception of Commissioner Higdon), the County Manager, Deputy Clerk, Finance Director, County Attorney, members of the news media and interested citizens were present.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Chairman Tate pointed out that Commissioner Higdon was in Arizona. Those in attendance then watched a video from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) that provided an update on recent NCACC activities. Commissioner Beale announced that there would be a parade honoring Vietnam veterans in Franklin on April 1, 2017, and that there would be a forum on the opiate epidemic in Burke County on April 7.

MOMENT OF SILENCE: Chairman Tate asked those in attendance to observe a moment of silence, and Commissioner Beale asked for remembrances for three families in the community who had recently lost loved ones.

PLEDGE TO THE FLAG: Led by Commissioner Gillespie, the pledge to the flag was recited.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD: **Jerry Anselmo** told the board that he was the owner of the Smoky Mountain Fish Camp located off of Highway 28 North, and that he and others had cleaned up litter in that area recently, but now it is “a disaster again.” He said he was looking for a long-term solution to the litter problem in the county, describing it as “horrendous.” He asked the board to see “if you all can help us in any way.” **John Rhem** said that he lives in Houston, Texas but travels to Macon County several times a year. He said he knew Mr. Anselmo personally and offered three suggestions for dealing with the litter issue: (1) educate children and adults about the impact of trash, (2) enforce the litter laws and (3) join with the Town of Highlands, who Mr. Rhem said has “declared war on trash.” **Azure Morris**, who attended the meeting with her grandmother, also urged the commissioners to “keep the land free from litter.” **Dr. Gus Wilde** echoed the comments of the speakers before him and told the board it was “distressing to see litter in such a beautiful area.” He

asked what steps other counties took to deal with the problem, which started a lengthy discussion involving Dr. Wilde, board members, Sheriff Robert Holland and several members of the audience. Chairman Tate wrapped the discussion up by stating that the board would take all of the comments regarding litter under advisement. **Jeff Pritz** described for the board an issue he has with the state Department of Transportation (DOT) concerning a fence that he built along his property. He said that while the fence made his neighbors happy and others regarded it as a safety improvement, DOT informed him four days after the fence went up that he was encroaching on the right-of-way and that the fence would need to come down. Mr. Pritz read from a prepared statement and showed the board a number of photographs before asking the commission to request DOT to grant him an encroachment agreement. Chairman Tate responded that the board “never got involved in a right-of-way issue” and Commissioner Beale suggested that Mr. Pritz request that DOT put in a guardrail. Mr. Pritz questioned allowing utilities to use the right-of-way but not citizens, and the County Attorney told him that was ultimately a DOT decision.

ADDITIONS, ADJUSTMENTS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted 4-0 to make additions to and approve the agenda as adjusted, as follows:

- To add three grant application requests and approval of a sliding fee scale for primary care patients as requested by Macon County Public Health as Item 11C under New Business.
- To add consideration of Budget Amendment #141 to the Consent Agenda (Item 12B), per the Finance Director.

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION ANNUAL REPORT: Alan Durden, the director of Macon County Cooperative Extension, presented each of the commissioners with a copy of the agency’s 2016 Program Impact Report, a copy of which is also on file in the Deputy Clerk’s office. Mr. Durden said eight specific objectives were addressed by agents, program assistants and volunteers in the areas of agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer science, community development and 4-H youth development. Mr. Durden supplied the board with specific statistical information, such as noting that staff members of the Macon County Center conducted or participated in 206 meetings, workshops, demonstrations, lectures and tours in delivering educational information, and that 4,524 people attended 739 hours of classroom and field instruction. In addition, 1,058 volunteers assisted with programming, donating 3,849 hours valued at \$90,682, or the equivalent of 1.9 full-time employees. Mr. Durden briefly outlined the agency’s most important programs. Commissioner Shields asked about 4-H involvement in litter clean up, and Mr. Durden said that while they are involved in service projects, he was not aware of any litter-related ones at this time, adding that the county’s nine community

clubs used to be involved in that “but have gotten away from it.” Commissioner Beale stated that one of the goals of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) was to ask state lawmakers to restore funding for Cooperative Extension to 2008 levels. No action was necessary.

COLON CANCER AWARENESS PRESENTATION: Michelle Brooks, the leader of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) group at Franklin High School, along with FHS students Caroline Foster and Jacob Smith, made a brief presentation regarding the group’s effort to raise awareness of colon cancer. Ms. Brooks explained that the age of colon cancer victims is getting younger and younger, and talked of efforts to lobby insurance companies to make the screening age younger. The students explained that they were headed for state competition in Greensboro next week, with the hope of winning and going to nationals in Anaheim, CA. The students then answered questions from the board members about their organization. No action was necessary.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS: Mitch Brigulio with Daverport & Company, LLC presented an extensive PowerPoint presentation that provided a financial review of the county’s current debt position as well as a tax supported debt profile. The financial review touched on a credit overview, the county’s general fund balance, prepayment opportunities for existing loans and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) initiatives. The tax supported debt profile looked at a peer comparative introduction and key debt ratio terms as well as debt “capacity” and “affordability.” Mr. Brigulio told the board that “you all are in very good financial shape.” He explained that the county is currently not rated by the credit rating agencies such as Moody’s Investors Service or Standard and Poors because the county has no public debt outstanding. He said the county has some opportunities to pay off debt, as there are 12 outstanding loans, but all have good interest rates. He went over two of the loans in detail, but noted that the terms make the payoff of those not as attractive as paying for capital improvement projects “as you go” might be. That led him to review the county’s tax supported debt profile, noting that the county has \$31.8-million in debt, all of which is scheduled to be paid off in the next 15 years. The county has debt capacity, he told the board, and suggested that the county formalize its debt practices. The discussion then turned to the CIP process, which Mr. Brigulio said takes nine to 12 months, with the identification of projects taking the longest. The County Manager suggested some possible timelines for a CIP, but Commissioner Beale stated that the county had facilities that needed attention now. No action was taken.

BUILDING A RECOVERY COMMUNITY: Christy Newell Wyatt, a counselor/substance use specialist with Western Carolina University,

presented an overview of “Building a Recovery Community” and described the steps being taken toward that goal on the campus at Cullowhee. She provided the board members with several handouts, and explained that recovery is a process, not an event. She told the board that she and others are changing the culture at the university by changing minds and overcoming the stigma of substance abuse. She noted that a study of inmates at the Haywood County Jail found that 85.5 percent of them had at least one substance abuse disorder, and stated that mandated treatment works and helps to make these individuals part of the community again. “We want you guys to know we are there and we exist,” she told the board, with Commissioner Beale responding that “the stigma is number one.” No action was taken.

Chairman Tate declared a recess at 7:52 p.m.

Chairman Tate called the meeting back to order at 8:02 p.m.

FOSTER CARE SOCIAL WORKER POSITION: Department of Social Services (DSS) Director Patrick Betancourt presented his request for a new position, a Social Worker III that will focus on foster care cases. He outlined his justification to the board in a one-page handout, a copy of which is attached (**Attachment 1**) and is hereby made a part of these minutes. He explained that Macon County DSS just assumed custody of its 50th child last week, and the current social workers in this area have caseload sizes that exceed state expectations by 10 cases each or 67 percent. He said the department has been able to piece things together but can’t manage the workload with just two employees, noting that the county has the potential to lose those two workers to “burnout.” During discussion with the board members, Mr. Betancourt pointed out that the county can draw down approximately half of the cost of the position from federal and state dollars. He said it will take \$15,034 to fund a position for the remainder of the fiscal year and \$60,651 for a full year, including fringe. After more discussion, Commissioner Beale made a motion to grant the request for the new position, and it was seconded by Commissioner Gillespie. Commissioner Shields noted that even with a third social worker, each employee will still have a caseload in excess of the expected number of 15. Mr. Betancourt pointed out that each foster child must be visited at least once monthly in their foster home, and due to the lack of such homes in the region, that could mean a trip as far away as Winston-Salem. The board voted 4-0 to grant the request.

SMOKY MOUNTAIN RELAY: Upon a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Beale, the board voted 4-0 to approve a letter from the County Manager to Sourwood Running, LLC granting the board’s acknowledgement and approval for a portion of the Smoky Mountain Relay to once again be held in Macon County, this time during April 21-22, 2017. A

copy of the letter is attached (Attachment 2) and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

PUBLIC HEALTH GRANT APPLICATIONS AND REVISED SLIDING FEE SCALE: Tammy Keezer with Macon County Public Health requested the board's permission to apply for three grant opportunities. She explained that all three are being brought to the commissioners "out of order" because the Board of Health did not have a quorum present at its February 28th meeting so a vote there could not be conducted. She added that commission approval is sought with the intent of not pursuing them if the Board of Health does not approve them at its March 28th meeting. Mrs. Keezer said all of the grant applications are due soon and at least one has the potential to be awarded prior to the commission's April meeting. A list of the grant opportunities and a brief description of each is attached (Attachment 3) and is hereby made a part of these minutes, and Mrs. Keezer briefly explained each to the commissioners. Following discussion, and upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted 4-0 to approve the request as presented. Diane Keener with Macon County Public Health then reviewed a proposed new sliding fee scale that has been approved by the Board of Health. Under the new plan, the health department could provide a 60 percent discount in the cost of services – based on income and family size – as opposed to the 20 percent discount now in place. Mrs. Keener provided examples of the effect of the new discount, and said it would extend to lab fees as well. Chairman Tate, who serves as the commission's representative on the Board of Health, said the members there were unanimously in favor of this, and the County Manager said the change will have no impact on the county's general fund. After further discussion, and upon a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Gillespie, the board voted 4-0 to approve the new sliding fee scale as presented, a copy of which is attached (Attachment 4) and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

CONSENT AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Gillespie, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to approve the items on the consent agenda as follows: the minutes of the February 14, 2017 regular meeting and the February 16, 2017 continued session; the following budget amendments: #136 for the Department of Social Services to allocate \$3,600 in adoption incentive funds; #137 for the Health Department to allocate \$21,557 in Medicaid Cost Settlement funds to cover the purchase of two Schick Sensors, an AirStar Compressor and also to cover the replacement of the toilet in the Molar Roller; #138 for the Emergency Services to appropriate \$39,000 received from the U.S. Forest Service for wildfire assistance; #141 for the Housing Department to appropriate \$15,000 in additional funds from a Duke Energy Helping Homes Health & Safety grant (Copies of the amendments are

attached); approved tax releases for February 2017 in the amount of \$4,558.25. Copies of the releases are on file in the Deputy Clerk's office.

APPOINTMENTS: **(1) Board of Equalization and Review:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted 4-0 to reappoint Dwight Vinson, Bill Martin, Kevin Spivey, Gary Drake and Kristine Flaig to the Macon County Board of Equalization and Review for a term of one year each. **(2) Library Board of Trustees:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted 4-0 to approve the following appointments to the Macon County Library Board of Trustees: (A) to appoint Dennis Sanders to the seat vacated by Charles Gorgoglione for a term of three years; (B) to appoint San Ho Choi to the seat vacated by Dan Kowal for a term of three years and (C) to appoint Frank Oliver to the seat being vacated by Chip Robert in May of 2017 for a term of three years. **(3) Mapping Review Officer:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Beale, the board voted 4-0 to approve Mike Ramsey as a Mapping Review Officer, replacing Stephen Hummel. **(4) Upcoming appointments:** The Deputy Clerk requested permission to place the remaining appointments for the calendar year on the county's website to facilitate the board's planning purposes and to give the public an idea of what positions are potentially available.

RECESS: At 8:46 p.m., following discussion, and upon a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Beale, the board voted 4-0 to recess the meeting until Tuesday, March 21, 2017 at 4:30 p.m. in the commission boardroom on the third floor of the Macon County Courthouse, 5 West Main Street, Franklin, NC.

Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

Jim Tate
Board Chairman