

MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
July 13, 2021
MINUTES

Chairman Tate called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All Board Members, County Manager Derek Roland, Deputy Clerk Mike Decker, Finance Director Lori Carpenter, County Attorney Eric Ridenour and members of the news media were present, as were a number of county employees and citizens.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- (A) Amanda Fuller Moore, Assistant Information Technology Director, was recognized for completing the Certified Government Chief Information Technology Officer (CGCIO) program at UNC Chapel Hill. Chairman Tate read a portion of a press release [Attachment 1] regarding the announcement. Ms. Moore was present and thanked the board for the opportunity.
- (B) Commissioner Beale announced that the American Legion will hold a flag disposal ceremony on Saturday, July 17, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. and encouraged everyone to attend, especially if you had not witnessed one of these ceremonies before.

MOMENT OF SILENCE: Chairman Tate requested that all in attendance rise and a moment of silence was observed.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

- (A) **Jim Gaston**, a member of the Cowee Community, spoke about a recent Gay Pride display in June at the Macon County Public Library's children's section. Mr. Gaston stated he was opposed to the display which he referred to as a "celebration of confusion" and believed the vast majority of Macon County citizens would be opposed to "glorifying anal sex and gender confusion" to our children and grandchildren. He stated that openly celebrating something devastating to children is not in the best interest of Macon County. He referred to the "frog in warm water" and "camel's nose in the tent" analogies and stated his belief that the citizens of Macon County do not want our children growing up

in a place that turns in to California or New York and encouraged the board to keep this county free of morale decay.

- (B) **Rebecca Tipton** shared her objection to the display at the library. She stated there were 15 books out and although she did not object to the books being in the library, she did object to them being displayed in a public area accessible to children. She stated that parents should have discretion over what topics they address and how they address those with their children. Ms. Tipton commented that transgenderism has really been pushing our culture since 2015 and she finds the championing of it problematic, and as a parent is not comfortable with her child going to the library and picking up a book about an individual person's journey with transgenderism including the political and medical aspects. Ms. Tipton closed by saying she believed in personal choice rather than pushing these issues out and putting them on display in a public place.
- (C) **Steve Connell** requested that the board members consider when they allocate funding how the monies are spent. He commented that the display at the library was better left in a location for adults to look at and not out for young children to see.
- (D) **Evan Lampkin** spoke about the proposed skate park that has been approved by the Town of Franklin. Mr. Lampkin stated he and other youth have participated in some fundraising activities and have raised approximately \$2,000, and JE Dunn Construction – the company currently building the new hospital – has donated their time to construct the park. He requested that the board support the park by donating money, equipment, etc. and informed the board that the town had approved a building site at the Jaycee Park.
- (E) **Tim Shaw** shared that he is the parent of two teenage skateboarders and that it is not unusual to get a phone call from them indicating they are going to “skate town.” He expressed his concerns about their safety and the legal aspects, emphasizing that kids need a place to do so safely and legally. He stated he had come to ask for the board's help and requested they step up and help with a monetary donation, materials, etc., and explained that the proposed park is not just for the town but for all of Macon County. Mr. Shaw referenced skateboarding as an Olympic sport which teaches bravery, tenacity and finesse, and encouraged the board members to be supportive and consider how they could change the future of an individual child with the ability to pursue an Olympic sport if they chose. Commissioner Beale asked about the park at First

United Methodist Church and Mr. Shaw replied it was great for beginners but not for someone with a little more advanced skill.

(F) **Jeff Lee** stated he was here in support of the broadband expansion.

(G) **Brittney Lofthouse** began by stating that she was speaking as a resident, not as a reporter. She indicated she had planned to speak about a different topic but after hearing the previous speakers comments about the display at the library, she was choosing to speak to that. Ms. Lofthouse stated she was disappointed that she did not know about the display at the library and had she known she would have celebrated Pride month and gone to see the display. Ms. Lofthouse shared that she has no fear for her children to be subjected to this display or books and that she applauds the library and is sorry they are not here to defend themselves. She indicated she has a relative who is a member of the LGBTQ community and is very passionate about this topic. Ms. Lofthouse stated there has been too much persecution and bullying around these topics as well as Macon County lives lost to suicide because they did not feel included or know who to turn to. She ended in expressing thanks to whoever did the display.

ADDITIONS, ADJUSTMENTS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to approve the agenda, as adjusted, as follows:

- To add Item 11G under New Business, Nantahala Library, per Commissioner Higdon, as a follow-up to his meeting with the community members the previous evening (July 12).
- To add Item 11H under New Business, Electoral District Brief Discussion, per Commissioner Higdon.
- To remove Item 11D, Resolution Exempting Architectural Services for former National Guard Armory renovation and improvements, as it would be better to discuss this in August or September, per Mr. Roland.

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

(A) Medicaid Transformation – Shelly Foreman, Community Relations Regional Director for Vaya Health, thanked the board for allowing her to attend and present. She reviewed and talked through a PowerPoint presentation explaining the goals and transition plan for Vaya Health to manage whole person care for those with more acute level behavioral health needs in the region, now referred to as a Tailored Plan. She shared that, as of July 1, 2021, Medicaid participants began receiving information on the transition process and how to select a plan. Ms. Foreman explained that Vaya Health had submitted their Request for Funding (RFA) and there has been a delay at the state level in announcing awards, but, she hopes Vaya will hear later this week with anticipation of a successful award of the tailored plan. Commissioner

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Beale thanked Ms. Foreman for coming to the meeting and for what she does. He stated that if Vaya is not successful we could lose local input and further shared that the awards are a competition and that of course the insurance companies look at the monetary piece rather than focus on the community aspect. Ms. Foreman reminded the board that 80 percent of Vaya's budget is Medicaid, so it is important for the community and region that Vaya be awarded the funding.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

(A) Clay/Macon Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan 2021 Update –

Emergency Management Director Warren Cabe stated that he is asking for approval of the renewal of the Hazard Mitigation Plan, which consists of strategies to lessen the effects of a disaster which has to be renewed every five years. He stated that having this plan in place allows the county to get disaster funding when it is available. Mr. Cabe indicated that North Carolina likes for the plans to be multi-jurisdictional, so this version of the plan was developed in cooperation with Clay County, the Town of Franklin and the Town of Highlands. In summary, he shared that this updated plan has more emphasis on wildfires because of the fires we had in 2016, cyber-attacks which really didn't exist during the renewal cycle five years ago, lots of historical data for the county, potential improvement projects, and so forth. Mr. Cabe stated he has requested funding multiple times in the past but has never received any funding. He shared that a copy of the plan can be found on the county's website under Public Announcements. A motion was made by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Higdon, to approve a "Resolution to Adopt the Clay Macon Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan as presented, a copy of which is attached (Attachment 2) and is hereby made a part of these minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

(B) Request for permission to apply for broadband grant –

Economic Development Director Tommy Jenkins stated that the county's broadband committee has an opportunity to apply for a grant through the National Telecommunications and Infrastructure Administration, which requires a public/private partnership in which a local government entity has to apply and choose the private internet service provider. He indicated that the committee met and since we already have a relationship with Balsam West on another project, decided it was logical to partner with them on this one. Mr. Jenkins shared the grant awards range from \$5 million to \$30 million with a low number of awards being made, but it is still important to apply. He stated the grant covers underserved areas and looks at the most effective way of providing broadband requiring a download speed of at least 100 mbps and an upload speed of at least 20 mbps. Mr. Jenkins stated

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that applications are due August 17, 2021. In addition, he shared that he applied for a grant through the Dogwood Health Trust to cover consultant fees needed for the broadband grant and was notified this afternoon that Dogwood Health Trust had awarded those funds. A motion was made by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Higdon, to submit the application as requested. After brief discussion about how these funds could be used to offset costs of projects currently underway and how the consultant fees would be handled, the board voted unanimously to proceed with the grant application.

(C) Request for release of surety bond for Highlands Falls County Club – Planning, Permitting and Development Director Jack Morgan stated that on October 19, 2020 we accepted a surety bond for Highlands Falls Country Club in the amount of \$12,500 for an improvement permit on the golf course. He indicated there were 26 acres involved requiring \$500 per acre. Mr. Morgan stated they are finished with the project and are requesting their money back. Commissioner Higdon made a motion, seconded by Commission Shields, to release the bond, and the vote was unanimous.

(D) Resolution Exempting Architectural Services for former National Guard Armory renovation and improvements – Mr. Morgan – This item was removed from the agenda at the request of Mr. Roland.

(E) Satisfaction of Security Instrument regarding Franklin Tubular Products – County Attorney Eric Ridenour briefly explained that this was a previous economic development incentive program that has been satisfied. Commissioner Beale made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields to approve the “Satisfaction of Security Instrument” as presented by the County Attorney. The vote was unanimous, and a copy of the document is attached **(Attachment 3)** and is hereby made a part of these minutes.

(F) Request for funding from KIDS Place – Commissioner Beale requested that Alisa Ashe speak to the board about her organization’s need for the county’s financial help and added that, for full disclosure, the board should be reminded that KIDS Place also receives Community Funding Pool funds and this is considered an emergency funding request due to the loss of 67 percent of the organization’s funding. Ms. Ashe thanked the board for allowing her to speak to them and make this request. She explained how KIDS Place serves children from birth to age 18 who have experienced trauma (physical abuse, sexual abuse, sexual assault, severe neglect, witness to violence, etc.), how their base funding is received through the Victims for Crime Act and does not come from state or local dollars. Ms. Ashe indicated they were notified last fall that their funding would be reduced by 30 to 35 percent, but the reduction turned out to be 67 percent. She shared that in 30 years of operation, KIDS Place has never had to come before the board of commissioners and request funding, but

that with reducing her budget to the bare minimum and including their fundraising efforts and donations, she would need \$110,000 to continue operating. Ms. Ashe stated that she is working with partners at both the state and federal level to restore funding, but that process will take three to four years. She indicated that KIDS Place could raise \$30,000 to \$35,000 through their planned fundraising initiatives, leaving them approximately \$75,000 – which she is requesting from the board. During discussion among the board members, Ms. Ashe stated that it costs approximately \$5,000 to train an interviewer on staff, but to contract that service out would cost approximately \$1,200 per interview and KIDS Place has conducted 43 interviews so far this year. She stated it would cost approximately \$2,000 for each medical exam if conducted somewhere else and they have conducted 21 exams in the past six months. She stated therapy sessions would cost about \$120 per hour and KIDS Place has saved the county about \$21,000 by being able to do those on site. Board members discussed options, including allocating all or a portion of the Community Funding Pool funds to KIDS Place, which would eliminate funding opportunities for the other agencies funded through that program. Following further discussion, Commissioner Beale made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to allocate \$75,000 from fund balance to KIDS Place as an emergency request. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-2, with Commissioners Beale, Tate and Shields in favor and with Commissioners Higdon and Young opposing.

(G) Nantahala Library – Commissioner Higdon stated that he had attended a meeting last night (July 12) in which members of the Nantahala community were requesting an update on the plan for the library and the building that was purchased by the county. Commissioner Higdon stated that the board needs to make a decision about whether the library is moving or not and bring resolution to this issue that has been ongoing for years. Commissioner Beale read a letter from the Macon County Library Board of Trustees requesting that the commissioners prioritize building a new library building on the school property. Discussion among members included getting quotes for demolishing the building on the recently purchased property and constructing a new facility, having county maintenance remove debris from the building and clean-up the surroundings, broadband capabilities and wireless options for the location, and getting input from the Macon County Board of Education about keeping the library on school property. Following discussion, Commissioner Higdon made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Young, to allocate \$5,000 from contingency to allow county maintenance staff to clean-up the property and to cover the associated landfill fees for disposal of the waste. The motion was approved by a 4-1 vote, with Commissioner Beale opposing.

(H)Electoral Districts – Commission Higdon passed out a packet of information and stated he would like this to be a topic of discussion on the August agenda. He stated that board membership is restrictive to Districts 1 and 3, allowing filing for a seat to occur every four years whereas District 2 allows filing every two years. Commissioner Higdon shared some options for redistricting which could be considered and requested the minutes reflect acknowledgment that each member received a packet. Chairman Tate shared that he brought this topic up when he first came on the board and is supportive of the discussion. He said, however, that his district makes up over 50% of the tax base and is the “economic lifeblood of this county,” and even though it is a small population, he would not want to see that district increase in size. Commissioner Beale requested that Mr. Ridenour look into the legal options and for the board to review the 2020 Census numbers for reference.

CONSENT AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Chairman Tate, the board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as presented, which includes: (A) Minutes of the April 13, 2021 regular meeting, the May 11, 2021 regular meeting, the May 25, 2021 continued session, the June 3, 2021 continued session, and the June 8, 2021 regular meeting, (B) Budget Amendment #1 for increased funding of \$16,647 for the Housing Department, Amendment #2 to move \$21,365 allocated for a vehicle for the Tax Office to FY 22-23, Amendment #3 appropriating \$28,800 from fund balance to Maintenance for equipment and repairs not received by 6/30/21, Amendment #4 appropriating \$34,643 from fund balance and \$130,172 from Homeland Security Grant to Emergency Management for equipment not received by 6/30/21, Amendment #5 to appropriate \$203,587 from fund balance to the Sheriff’s Office for equipment not received by 6/30/21, Amendment #6 appropriating \$1,112 for federal forfeiture funds, \$25,578 for federal forfeiture funds, and \$702 for treasury forfeiture funds from fund balance to Non-Capital Equipment for the Sheriff’s Department, Amendment #7 appropriating \$71,565 from fund balance to Information Technology for services and equipment not received by 6/30/21, Amendment #8 appropriating \$120,047 from fund balance to EMS for ambulance remount not completed by 6/30/21, Amendment #9 carrying forward \$60,000 in fund balance for Gallagher Benefit Services contract for the pay study, Amendment #10 appropriating \$79,000 from fund balance to Macon County Schools Capital expense for Cartoogechaye and FHS HVAC, and Amendment #11 appropriating \$35,400 from fund balance to Senior Services for HVAC units not received by 6/30/21 (copies of amendments attached). (C) Tax releases in the amount of \$2,692.47, (D) Billing Guide, fee schedule and vaccine fee update summary for Macon County Public Health (attached), (E) Agreement to Provide Recreation Opportunities with the Scaly Mountain Historical Group (attached), (F) Service Contract with the Franklin Area Chamber of Commerce (attached), (G) Service Contract with the Highlands Area Chamber of Commerce

(attached), (H) Resolution Accepting American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds (attached), (I) Grant Project Ordinance Amendment for Weatherization Assistance Program FY 2021 (#8217) (attached), (J) Grant Project Ordinance Amendment for Weatherization Assistance Program FY 2022 (attached), (K) Macon Middle School Locker Room Project – Reject bids received on June 21, 2021 as only one bid was received and authorize staff to re-advertise the project, (L) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report – no action necessary.

APPOINTMENTS:

(A) Library Board (2 seats) – Commissioner Beale made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to approve the reappointment of Mr. Wood Lovell and Mr. Bill Trotter for additional three-year terms on the Macon County Library Board of Trustees. The motion passed unanimously.

CLOSED SESSION – At 7:49 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Beale, seconded by Commissioner Young, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session as allowed under NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) to preserve the attorney/client privilege and 143-318.11(a)(5) regarding the acquisition of real property with no action planned following the closed session. At 8:28 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to come out of closed session and return to open session.

ADJOURN: With no other business, at 8:29 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.

Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

Jim Tate
Board Chair