

MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
August 9, 2022
MINUTES

Vice-Chairman Beale called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All Board Members (with the exception of Chairman Tate), 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 Highlands Mayor Patrick Taylor, Franklin Mayor Jack Horton, as well as a number of county employees and citizens.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- (A) Vice-Chairman Beale explained that Chairman Tate is out of town.
- (B) Vice-Chairman Beale announced that he and Mr. Roland would be attending the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) meeting later this week, and would have a report at the September meeting.
- (C) Vice-Chairman Beale announced that a resolution regarding wastewater would be presented at the September regular meeting and then presented to the NCACC on behalf of Commissioner Higdon.

MOMENT OF SILENCE: Vice-Chairman Beale asked that the family of Josh Orr be remembered. Mr. Orr was a volunteer firefighter who recently lost his life while swimming. Vice-Chairman Beale requested that all in attendance rise and a moment of silence was observed.

PLEDGE TO THE FLAG: Led by Deputy Clerk Mike Decker, the pledge to the flag was recited.

PUBLIC HEARING(S): None

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD: **John deVille** spoke about the Franklin High School project. He thanked the commissioners, the Macon County Board of Education, Mr. Roland and Macon County Schools Superintendent Dr. Chris Baldwin for their leadership and guidance in paving the way for two key leadership bodies to speak in one voice. He said he had heard two views from the opposing side. First, that the proposed facility and property are too small and secondly the desire to have no tax increase. **Jim Strauss** spoke about a safety issue with a cove on Choga Creek off of Nantahala Lake due to the absence

of a “no wake free zone.” He requested the board address the issue and pass a resolution creating one. **Dylan Castle** shared questions he has regarding the proposed Franklin High School project and requested the board share information about previous properties that have been considered, how the number of planned students was calculated as well as plans for maintenance and upkeep of the new facility. **Town of Highlands Mayor Patrick Taylor** spoke in support of the proposed plans for Franklin High School and acknowledged the support the project shows for investing in the future of the children of Macon County. He stated he was publically endorsing the building of the new school. **Tom Oswalt**, President of the Nantahala Community Club, spoke in support of the quarter-cent sales tax increase to support building the new school.

ADDITIONS, ADJUSTMENTS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Young, the board voted 4-0 to approve the agenda as presented.

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS: None

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

(A) Request to increase Clerk of Court/Facilities budget – Macon County Clerk of Superior Court Shawna Thun Lamb presented a budget request to purchase desks, chairs for the public, desk chairs and shelving units for storage for the clerk’s office in the Macon County Courthouse in the amount of \$5,700. Upon a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Young, the board voted 4-0 to amend the budget to transfer funds from contingency to cover the purchases.

(B) Molar Roller Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) funding request – Macon County Public Health Director Kathy McGaha stated that the Molar Roller is 19 years old and had an original life expectancy of 10 years. She shared that at 15 years of age, it underwent a partial refurbishment with an expected gain of five additional years. Ms. McGaha provided a PowerPoint presentation, which is attached [Attachment 1] and is hereby made a part of these minutes, sharing statistics regarding children under the age of 19 who are served by the Molar Roller. She indicated the average number of visits between 2013 and 2019 were 9,370 per year. Buildings and Grounds Director Mike Cope described the current problems with moving and setting up the unit, including controls not working, hydraulic leaks and inoperable jacks. He said the unit weighs approximately 8,700 pounds and the next move will have to be the final move with a permanent location at Mountain View Intermediate (MVI) School. Ms. McGaha stated it currently takes about two years to get a new unit, and some vendors

offer a payment plan allowing for the unit to be paid for over the two-year period. She indicated she is looking for grant opportunities, as well as utilizing Medicaid Cost Settlement funds and reassignment of county funds to cover the cost of the unit. After a brief discussion, Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to open the bidding process to assess the cost and look at funds the health department can contribute, and the vote was 4-0.

(C) Announcement of demonstration dates for new voting equipment –

Board of Elections Director Melanie Thibault gave an update on the request for new voting equipment. She stated the request was first made a couple of years ago as the current equipment is over 20 years old and has exceeded its use. Ms. Thibault indicated that Macon County is one of only five counties in the state who do not have current equipment and explained the process that must be carried out before purchasing the new machines: 1) Witness a public demonstration of two different voting systems, 2) Board of Elections recommends purchase of voting system equipment, 3) Board of Elections has to test the new system and equipment in a specific precinct or a simulated election, 4) Board of Commissioners has to make a resolution to purchase the equipment and 5) the North Carolina State Board of Elections approves the purchase. She shared dates for the public demonstrations of August 23, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. for Elections Systems and Software (ES&S), and August 30, 2022 at 6:00 p.m. for Hart InterCivic, Inc. with both demonstrations to be held at the Robert C. Carpenter Community Building. Ms. Thibault indicated the goal is to purchase the equipment in 2023 and have it ready to use in the municipal election in November 2023. She said the department currently have 22 machines and will be requesting to purchase twenty-four at an estimated cost of \$250,000.

(D) 2023 Schedule of Values, Standards and Rules –

Tax Administrator Abby Braswell provided a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed reappraisal data on property sales by township. She shared that in 2021 there were 1,853 total qualified sales and in 2022 there have been 815 qualified sales and we are half-way through the year. Additionally, Ms. Braswell shared that in 2019 the taxable value was \$7,969,346,695 and is estimated to be at \$12,029,130,971 in 2023 – a 50.94 percent increase. She stated that she will provide another snapshot in January and requested the proposed Schedule of Values, Standards and Rules be slated for a public hearing at the regular meeting scheduled for September 13, 2022 and then approved/adopted in accordance with NCGS §105-317 at the regular meeting scheduled for October 11, 2022. There was a consensus among the board members to accept the schedule as presented.

(E) Update on one-quarter-cent county sales and use tax – Commissioner Shields provided an update from the Franklin High School Project Committee and thanked those in attendance who were here to support the project. He indicated the next public meeting to look at the schematic design is tentatively scheduled for October. Mr. Roland stated there is a need for \$100 million-plus to fund the new high school. He indicated the application to the North Carolina School Fund requesting \$50 million last fiscal year was not successful and there are plans to resubmit the application in November. He reminded the board of the approval of the quarter-cent sales tax on the November ballot and that the resolution that was passed says if the ballot passes, the funds can be used for the new high school. Mr. Roland also clarified that this proposed increase does not affect the purchase of groceries and gas. He shared a brochure that has been developed to provide citizens with information about the quarter-cent initiative as well as the question as it will appear on the November ballot. Vice-Chairman Beale shared that he attended the Rebounding Stronger Summit in Cherokee today and stated that Governor Roy Cooper and other key leaders were present. He stated there was a lot of discussion about grants and other funds that are available, and that Macon County needs to be prepared to apply for these grants and funds when they become available. Vice-Chairman Beale also stated that the ballot will not and cannot contain language regarding how the funds will be spent from the quarter-cent sales tax, and that the board cannot vote to support or not support the quarter-cent sales tax. However, Vice-Chairman Beale stated the board could budget those funds to be spent specifically for the high school project.

(F) Franklin High School Project – Mr. Roland stated that, following the July 26, 2022 joint meeting with the Macon County Board of Education, he and Mr. Ridenour were instructed to enter into negotiations with LS3P for Phase III for the schematic design of the main building, which has been completed, via an addendum to the current contract in the amount of \$476,161. He said these funds were part of the approximate \$800,000 appropriated in the FY '23 budget. The board then took the following action:

(1) Resolution of Amendment to Agreement between Macon County and LS3P Associates, Ltd. - Vice-Chairman Beale read part of the resolution into the record, followed by a motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commission Young, to approve the resolution as presented. The vote was 4-0.

(2) Second Amendment to Owner-Architect Agreement – There was a motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to approve the addendum to the LS3P agreement, and the vote was 4-0.

CONSENT AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted 4-0 to approve the consent agenda as presented, which includes: (A) Minutes of the June 14, 2022 regular meeting and the July 26, 2022 continued session, (B) Budget Amendments #15-27, (C) Tax releases for the month of July (None), and (D) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report – for which no action was necessary.

APPOINTMENTS: None.

CLOSED SESSION – None.

ADJOURN: With no other business, at 8:28 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Young, the board voted 4-0 to adjourn.

Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

Jim Tate
Board Chair