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PG: 198-204

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11-01-2023

02:37:09 PM

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**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JULY 11, 2023
MINUTES**

Chairman Higdon 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, and County Attorney Eric Ridenour were present, as were a number of county employees, media, and citizens.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: None

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Led by Commissioner Young, the pledge to the flag was recited.

PUBLIC HEARING(S): None

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD: Howard Carley spoke about the budget process and encouraged board members to do the best they can with what they have as they make tough decisions, to use resources, and not worry about those who say board members didn't stick to the party line.

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

- To add Item 11(D) under New Business, Boundary Line Clean-up for Pine Grove School, per Attorney Ridenour
- To add Item 11(E) under New Business, Consideration and Approval of Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with NC Department of Health and Human Services for Macon County Department of Social Services (DSS) telephone technology upgrades, per Mr. Roland

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- To add Item 9(B) under Reports and Presentations, Franklin Garden Club, per Chairman Higdon
- To remove Item 10(C) under Old Business, Discussion Regarding Highlands Middle School Renovation Project, per Mr. Roland

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS:

(A) RECOGNITION OF OFFICERS BY SHERIFF HOLBROOKS –

Sheriff Holbrooks began by summarizing an emergency call that took place on June 23, 2023, at approximately 1:00 a.m. regarding an explosion at a residence in the Ellijay Community. Sheriff Holbrooks said Officers Daniel Long and, Bradley Carter were first on the scene of a badly burned individual with life-threatening injuries. He indicated that Deputies Carter and Long saved David Holland’s life. Sheriff Holbrooks presented Deputy Long with a Lifesaving Award and indicated Deputy Carter was on vacation but would receive the same award upon his return. Donald Holland the brother of David Holland spoke about and thanked the officers and shared his appreciation for their actions. Theighlor Holland the daughter of David Holland spoke about her father and his love for the community and shared his appreciation for the officers who saved his life. Chairman Higdon requested to keep Mr. Holland and the family in their prayers and thanked the family for being here.

(B) FRANKLIN GARDEN CLUB –

Shirley Speed and guest spoke about the garden club and how they keep the gardens on Main Street looking nice. They said they are dedicated to making Franklin beautiful for our guests and the people who live here. Chairman Higdon says he and the club have discussed the needs with the Town of Franklin and he wants to improve courthouse grounds and designate someone to lead the project. Ms. Speed said the Franklin Garden Club has a Facebook page that keeps the community informed of what they are doing. She also shared that Teen Challenge comes out and helps them on a regular basis. Ms. Speed indicated that repairs are needed to the clock tower. Chairman Higdon said the Town of Franklin has been working with LBJ Job Corp to make those repairs.

OLD BUSINESS:

(A) CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF BIDS FOR A NEW MOLAR ROLLER –

Macon County Public Health Finance Officer Melissa Setzer gave a review of the approval for funding to purchase a new unit during the recent budget meetings. Ms. Setzer summarized Request for Proposals (RFP) process that had been completed to seek bids for the unit. She said the current unit 20 years old and the parts are obsolete with no aftermarket parts being available. Ms.

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Setzer indicated that after bids were received, a committee of seven staff had reviewed the bid packages and are recommending approval to award the bid to Lifeline Mobile. Commissioner Young stated he had teachers reach out to him after the budget meeting and expressed that the unit is an asset and asked for a description of the proposed unit. Ms. Setzer indicated that the unit will be a fully functioning turn-key clinic and includes all dental equipment, chairs, and a panoramic X-ray machine. Jimmy Villiard shared that the next closest bid was for a smaller unit but that the Lifeline unit has three operatories which is what is needed. Ms. Setzer stated the bid was \$869,000 which is \$169,000 under what was proposed. Commissioner Shearl asked if sure that this is all-inclusive and nothing has been overlooked. Mr. Villiard responded that there is no anticipation of additional expenses and said the timeline is approximately 18 months from the signing of the contract to delivery. Mr. Villiard said during that 18 months, the current unit will only be moved when safely able to do so. Commissioner Higdon asked about disposal of current unit. Ms. Setzer said current estimates are between \$50,000 and \$60,000 for the shape the unit is in now, but in 18 months the value will most likely decrease. Commissioner Young said he wants to make sure the students at Nantahala School have the same opportunity as the other schools for receiving services from the Molar Roller. Mr. Villiard said the school system has historically bused those students to Cartoogechaye Elementary when needed. Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shearl to award the bid to Lifeline Mobile in the amount of \$700,419. Vote was unanimous.

- (B) DISCUSSION REGARDING NANTAHALA BROADBAND REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)** – Mr. Jeff Lee of Little T Broadband Services provided an update from the broadband committee on all the current projects including the South Macon broadband extension program, Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF), Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant, Nantahala Township RFP, and future opportunities. He shared a PowerPoint presentation indicating that the South Macon expansion project was initiated in 2020 and has connected over 18 businesses, Otto and Scaly Mountain Community Centers and Fire Stations, and 243 private residents to broadband services. He shared that Charter Communications was awarded the RDOF bid for 60% of Macon County but they are not currently in Macon County and do not plan arrival here until 2025 with completions required by 2028. Mr. Lee said that the areas that were awarded to Charter Communications are not eligible for other grant programs

during this time. He reminded board members that Frontier was awarded the GREAT grant with 27 locations they will serve and the County just signed an agreement with Frontier and the State in May with the County contributing \$50,000 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds toward the project. Mr. Lee shared that a second GREAT grant was awarded in the amount of one-million dollars to BalsamWest to serve areas in Otto, Scaly Mountain, and Highlands. He said Macon County will also have a \$50,000 match of ARPA funds. Mr. Lee said the RFP for the Nantahala project using remaining funds from the Nantahala Library project requested fiber service for five locations (EMS, Volunteer Fire Department, Library and Community Center, and the Volunteer Fire Department substation) and received responses from BalsamWest and Charter Communications. He stated that the committee recommends the bid be awarded to BalsamWest. Commissioner Higdon gave a letter from the Nantahala Community Club to Mr. Lee which indicates that Nantahala Library is pursuing Starlink for services. Mr. Lee advised that Starlink is a short-term solution but would not be a lifeline solution as Starlink works great based on weather. Motion by Commissioner Shields, seconded by Commissioner Young to accept bid of BalsamWest and to negotiate contract which will be brought back to the board for consideration and approval. Vote was unanimous.

(C) DISCUSSION REGARDING HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL RENOVATION PROJECT – Removed

(D) DISCUSSION REGARDING UNION ACADEMY IN RELATION TO FRANKLIN HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT – Commissioner Shields said a portion of the Franklin High School (FHS) project is to be grant funded and a condition of those grants is the concept of a school within a school. He stated that the Macon County Board of Education passed an agreement indicating that they want to merge Union Academy into FHS. Superintendent Josh Lynch confirmed that Macon County Schools is supportive of consolidation and said that Union Academy is currently at a disadvantage due to distance and travel issues for the high school and this will remove those barriers. Mr. Lynch said the school system hope to continue to allow Union Academy to have their own branding but this will provide more opportunities such as Career and Technical Education (CTE), extra-curricular activity participation, etc. Principal Brian Moffitt spoke about Union Academy and looking forward to the students having more opportunities for success. Commissioner Young mentioned some activities such as band that the students at Union Academy cannot

currently participate in and commented on the age of the facility being a barrier. Mr. Moffitt indicated they have no library and less than half of a gym. Commissioner Antoine said the students deserve as much as any other child and for them to not have the opportunities is wrong. Macon County Board of Education member Diedre Breeden said she supports this concept. Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine for the Board of Commissioners to agree for Union Academy to merge into the FHS project. Vote was unanimous.

NEW BUSINESS:

(A) CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL ConCPT GRANT FUNDING FOR MACON COUNTY TRANSIT – Transit Director Darlene Asher gave an overview of the grant saying the purpose of ConCPT funding is to enhance coordination activities where three or more public transportation grantees agree to establish formal relationships to maximize resources, gain efficiencies, and improve access to public transportation. She said she is asking for \$108,000 each year for two years to partner with Haywood County Transportation to coordinate trips to Asheville NC and the funding will pay for a new full-time Transit Operator to run the route Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with a stop in Haywood County to pick-up their passengers that need to go to Asheville. Ms. Asher said at end of the two years she can reapply at which time we would receive 50 percent of the current amount with a 50 percent match by the county. She said at that time we would be able to charge Haywood County and could possibly add Jackson County as a partner as well. Ms. Asher said the planned stops in Asheville include Mission Hospital, Asheville Mall, VA Hospital, etc. Motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Shearl to approve the additional funding and add a new full-time Operator Position to Macon County Transit. Vote was unanimous.

(B) CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL 5339(B) GRANT FUNDS FOR MACON COUNTY TRANSIT – Ms. Asher gave an overview of the grant funds which she plans to use for lighting for the parking lot, to reseal and restripe the parking lot, for window treatments for the building, a TV mount, solar panels to have the infrastructure to prepare for use of electric vehicles, etc. She said she is requesting \$200,000. Commissioner Shearl asked why not get an electric vehicle now and she explained the battery life of electric vehicles is not capable of meeting our needs currently due to the mileage and conditions currently encountered in Macon County. Ms. Asher requested a county match of \$40000 to finish the proposed

projects. She said the current electric bill is about \$6,000 a year which will be saved by the addition of the solar panels. Commissioner Young said he itemized the cost of items other than solar panels which amounts to about \$20,000. Commissioner Higdon stated we just went through a budget process and here we are already asking for changes. Commissioner Shields made a motion to take \$40,000 from the general fund contingency, appropriate \$160,000 to the Transit budget and to approve the accompanying budget amendment. Motion died for lack of a second.

- (C) **CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF LEASE RENEWAL FOR COMMUNITY CARE CLINIC OF FRANKLIN** – Mr. Roland indicated that the attorney has reviewed the lease renewal which is an annual agreement. Motion by Commissioner Higdon, seconded by Commissioner Shields to approve the lease as presented. Vote was unanimous.
- (D) **DISCUSSION REGARDING BOUNDARY LINE CLEAN-UP FOR PINE GROVE SCHOOL** – Mr. Ridenour gave an update on the historical deeds of the property which had most recently been deeded to the Preservation Society and has now been deeded back to Macon County. He said there were some boundary overlaps so a new survey was done and he reviewed the map showing the overlaps. Mr. Ridenour stated he has spoken with the property owners of Highlands Luxury and the Statton family and all agree to clean up the boundaries. Mr. Ridenour requested a motion to approve the quitclaim deed exchanges to clean up the boundaries. Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine to approve the deeds as presented. Vote was unanimous.
- (E) **CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT (MOA) WITH NCDHHS FOR COUNTY DSS TELEPHONE TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES** –Department of Social Services representative Sheila Conley gave an overview of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) and the expansion of services gained by the new phone system. She said the State is going to reimburse us \$5,406 with the board's approval for DSS Director Patrick Betancourt to sign the MOA. Motion by Commissioner Antoine, seconded by Commissioner Shields to approve the request as presented. Vote was unanimous.

CONSENT AGENDA: Upon a motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as presented which includes: (A) Minutes of the June 8, 2023 special meeting, the June 13 regular meeting, the June 19, 2023 continued meeting, and the June 26, 2023 special meeting, (B) Budget Amendment #1, (C) Approval of the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council County Plan for FY 2023-24, (D) Approval of the Scaly Mountain Recreation Agreement for FY 2023-24, (E) Grant Project Ordinance ESFRLP2315, (F) Tax releases for the month of April in the amount of \$654.72, and (G) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report – no action necessary

APPOINTMENTS:

A. Jury Commission (1 seat) - Consent to table the appointment of Vivian Honey until next month and to invite Clerk of Superior Court Shawna Lamb to come and talk about the roles of the Jury Commission.

CLOSED SESSION: At 7:53 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session as allowed under NCGS 143-318.11(a) (3) in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege, NCGS 143-381.11(a) (4) to discuss matters relating to economic development incentives, and NCGS 143-381.11(a) (5) to possibly negotiate a contract on real property. At 8:27 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to come out of closed session and return to open session with no action needed.

ADJOURN: With no other business, at 8:28 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.



Derek Roland
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board



Paul Higdon
Board Chair