

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
COUNTY OF AVERY**

The Avery County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, July 6, 2020 at 3:30 p.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC.

Members Present: Martha Hicks, Chair; Tim Phillips, Vice-Chair; Dennis Aldridge; Blake Vance

Members Absent: Wood Hall Young, Jr.

*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Governor Cooper's Executive Order No.121 issued on March 27, 2020 limiting mass gatherings to no more than 10 people at a time, the public was not allowed to attend the meeting in person. The meeting was broadcast live and recorded on the Avery County Youtube Channel.*

**Call To Order**

Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Phillip Barrier, Jr. led prayer.

Blake Vance led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Hicks called the roll of the Board members. Wood Hall Young, Jr. was absent.

**Proclamations and Awards**

Phillip Barrier, Jr., County Manager, recognized county employees who had worked for Avery County for 15 years. These employees were: Jack McCloud; Casey Lee; Joielle Calhoun; Jean Stamey; Robert Woody; Cecily Avery; Amy Greene; Jennie Jarrett; Mark Forbes; Dellmos Vance.

**Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**Board Appointments**

Review of applicants for the Workforce Development Board (Stephanie Greer); Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (Todd Griffin); and Agricultural Advisory Board (Jack Wiseman).

**Avery County Ranger's Report – Joe Shoupe**

Joe Shoupe reported that the county staff still consists of the Smoke Chaser position which is a temporary 8-month employee and myself. We continue to maintain a Strike Team of local firefighters who have the training and availability to assist us as needed, with fires or natural disasters in the county. We currently have 30 active members. In addition, the support staff at the Lenoir District Office is there as well to assist us as needed.

The citizens of Avery County continue to benefit from the N.C. Forest Service BRIDGE Crew Program. This program utilizes non-violent youthful offenders to perform fire

control and forestry related work and community service projects throughout western North Carolina. Crew members are paid \$1.00 per day, therefore resulting in tremendous savings to the taxpayers of our county. They are regularly used by local governments, fire departments, and non-profit organizations in Avery County.

The NC Forest Service also continues to operate the Linville River Nursery which provides seedlings for the Christmas tree industry, and many groups utilize the Mountain Training Facility on the Gill State Forest near Crossnore.

Avery County experienced typical fire seasons in fall of 2019, and spring of 2020. We responded to 23 wildland fire calls, of which 9 were false alarms, controlled burns, etc. The 14 fires we responded to only burned 14 acres. Quick, aggressive attack on these fires by the NC Forest Service and Volunteer Fire Departments kept them small and protected at least 29 homes and structures valued at approximately \$4,820,000.

As in years past, escaped debris burns were the leading cause of fires in Avery County. Responsible persons were identified in most of those with 9 warning tickets issued. This is an effective fire prevention tool.

A burn ban was in place from April 3<sup>rd</sup> -13<sup>th</sup>, during which we extinguished 17 illegal burns. This was during a dry period and was intended to help limit exposure to Covid-19. Last year approximately 3000 burn permits were issued by our permit agents and online via our web site.

We are continually promoting the Firewise Communities Program that addresses the serious Wildland/Urban Intermix problem we have in our county. We are also maintaining the Community Wildfire Protection Program (CWPP) which incorporates all pre-attack plans into 1 per fire district. One part of the CWPP program is to encourage landowners to take steps to protect their homes prior to a wildfire. This year I updated Fall Creek VFD's CWPP Plan, and assisted NC State Parks with updating their pre-fire plans for Grandfather Mtn. State Park and Yellow Mtn. Natural Area.

It is the responsibility of the N.C. Forest Service to assist private landowners with the management of their forests. Providing landowners with professional advice on managing their forestland takes up a large portion of our time. Upon request, we will make a site visit and examine their forestland in order to develop a forest management plan for their property. This plan is designed to guide them in sound management so their forest will be more productive, as timber is a renewable resource much like a crop. There is now a fee for certain plans. Also, several cost-share programs are available to assist landowners with establishing or improving a forest stand.

Approximately 55 landowners or communities received on the ground assistance directly related to forest management. Specific accomplishments for this year are as follows:

- 21 management plans written for 588 acres
- 127 acres naturally regenerated

- 14 acres were site prepared and planted to white pine
- 10+ acres were planted for wildlife food plots
- 12 acres of soil & water protection practices
- 10 acres of fishery protection
- 7 sacks of yellow poplar tree seeds collected for our nurseries to grow seedlings for the public.
- 13 landowners referred to consulting foresters or certified arborists for assistance with timber sales, etc.
- 7 Urban forestry assists.

Mr. Shoupe thanked the Board for their continued support of the Avery Ranger's Office and the NC Forest Service.

### **Avery County Humane Society**

Gwynne Dyer, Director of the Avery County Humane Society, gave a brief update to the Board. Ms. Dyer stated that in two years that there had been 1300 animals come through the shelter with 1000 adoptions. Fifty-five cats and forty dogs is all that we can keep. There are times that people might bring animals to us and want us to take it and we might be full. Sometimes we don't just have room. There is a 94% adoption rate. We spay and neuter all of the animals that come to us. The vets in the county do help us with spay/neuter but we also send the animals to Asheville. During the pandemic, we have given free dog food to 275 people. At any time anyone can come to the shelter and we will give them food. We have been able to maintain our employees during this pandemic because of a payroll protection plan. We currently have two full time employees and seventeen part-time employees.

Blake Vance stated that there had been a strained relationship in the past with the Avery County Humane Society. Ms. Dyer said she was working on mending that relationship. She felt that getting more information out to the citizens would help also.

Chair Hicks thanked Ms. Dyer for her presentation.

### **Tax Administrator Report – Bruce Daniels**

#### **Tax Collections Report**

The Tax Collections for the month of June are \$79,486.37.

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Dennis Aldridge to approve the Tax Collections as presented. Motion unanimous with those in attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

There were no releases to approve.

Mr. Daniels stated that the sales were trending in a positive direction. There were 69 sales at 78% this year as compared to 48 sales at 102% last year.

Mr. Daniels stated that the 2019 Total tax levy was \$21,187,126.13. The total taxes collected for 2019 were \$20,712,713.71 with a collection rate of 97.76%. The total levy for years 2009-2019 tax bills was \$197,805,281.59; the total collected was \$196,607,123.30 with a collection rate of 99.39%. The total levy for real and personal property was \$195,100,138.23; the total collected was \$194,054,745.19 with a collection rate of 99.46%.

There are \$2,566.47 in payment agreements for 2019; \$7,697.65 for years 2009-2019. There are \$3,626.92 in outstanding bankruptcies for 2019; \$9,795.35 in outstanding bankruptcies for years 2009-2019. There are \$15,110.88 in outstanding attorney pursuits in 2019; \$212,069.69 in outstanding attorney pursuits for years 2009-2019.

### **Home and Community Care Block Grant – Philip Adams**

Philip Adams, Director of the Senior Center, presented the county funding plan to the Board. The funding is \$4600 less than last year but I expect to receive between \$3,000 and \$5,000 in September or October. We are also receiving the Cares Act Funding in the amount of \$60,000; \$43,000 of that will be for meals.

Dennis Aldridge stated that at the last High Country Council of Government meeting that this money was talked about. Mr. Aldridge questioned when this money would be received. Mr. Adams said they were expecting it at any time.

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Tim Phillips to approve the County Funding Plan for 2020/2021. Motion unanimous with those in attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

### **Resolution Authorizing the Release of Lottery Funds**

**WHEREAS**, the Avery County, North Carolina, Board of Commissioners and the Avery County, North Carolina, Board of Education met in joint session and discussed the proposed construction of a roof replacement for Crossnore Elementary School (hereafter “the Project”); and

**WHEREAS**, the estimated cost of the roof replacement is in excess of One Million Dollars; and

**WHEREAS**, as of 27 May 2020, Avery County has a balance in the amount of \$364,220.93 from the North Carolina Education Lottery; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Education has requested that an amount up to \$350,000.00 be requested from lottery funds for the roof replacement at Crossnore Elementary School; and

**NOW THEREFORE**, the Board of Commissioners authorizes the following:

That the amount of \$350,000.00 be requested from lottery funds for the roof replacement at Crossnore Elementary School.

The Board of Commissioners authorizes the Chair to sign this Resolution.

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Tim Phillips to adopt the Resolution Authorizing the Release of Lottery Funds. Motion unanimous with those in attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

**Resolution Authorizing the Lease of Property to Daymark Recovery Service, Inc.**

The Board does hereby find and determine as follows:

**WHEREAS**, the County of Avery owns certain real property located in Linville Township, the Town of Newland, and more particularly described in Book 466, Page 429 of the Avery County Register of Deeds; and

**WHEREAS**, Daymark Recovery Services, Inc., desires to lease said property for the purposes of delivering mental health and substance abuse services to the residents of Avery County; and

**WHEREAS**, the County and Daymark have agreed upon a lease, under which Daymark will lease said property for a period of three years beginning on 1 July 2020; and

**WHEREAS**, in consideration of leasing said property, Daymark has agreed to pay monthly rent in the amount of \$2,000.00 per month; and

**WHEREAS**, North Carolina General Statute § 160A-272 authorizes the County to enter into leases of less than ten years upon resolution by the Board of County Commissioners adopted at a regular meeting after ten days public notice; and

**WHEREAS**, the required notice has been published and the Board of Commissioners has convened in a regular meeting;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Board of Commissioners (the “Board”) of the County of Avery, North Carolina, (the “County”): that the Board hereby approves the lease of the county property described above to Daymark Recovery Services, Inc., for a period beginning on 1 July 2020 and ending 30 June 2023, such lease being for a period of less than ten years, and authorizes the Chair of the Board of Commissioners to execute any and all documents necessary to the lease the premises. The Chair is further authorized to sign this Resolution.

Michaëlle Poore, County Attorney, advised that the lease was for a three year term at \$2,000 a month. Notice of the lease had to be published in the newspaper and a copy of that is in the board packet.

**Motion by Tim Phillips and second by Blake Vance to adopt the Resolution Authorizing the Lease of Property to Daymark Recovery Services, Inc. Motion unanimous with those attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

**County Manager Updates – Phillip Barrier, Jr.**  
**COVID-19 update**

We currently have 25 cases. There are some more Covid related funding coming from the federal government. We have a meeting with a consultant firm regarding the FEMA funds.

#### Skyline/Skybest update

Skyline/Skybest has issued a press release stating that they are partnering with the Avery County Schools to expand network services over the entire district wide-area network.

#### Community Building Update

The huge metal beams have been placed and the slab is ready to be poured.

#### **Finance Officer Report – Ashley Ingwersen**

##### **Budget Amendment**

The Transportation Department has received an AMY Wellness Foundation Grant to be used for coordinating managed care transportation between Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties.

**Motion by Tim Phillips and second by Blake Vance to adopt the Budget Amendment in the amount of \$20,430.00 with a debit of \$2,400.00 to Maintenance Contracts (106300.1540); debit of \$15,300.00 to Maintenance Contracts (106300.1540); debit of \$1,730.00 to Office Supplies (106300.3300); debit of \$1,000.00 to Marketing (106300.2600); credit of \$20,430.00 to Transportation (103610.0000). Motion unanimous with those in attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

##### **Budget Amendment**

At the June 23, 2020 joint meeting between the Board of Commissioners and the School Board, it was discussed about the Crossnore Elementary Roof Project. The board is committing to pay \$1,048,760.00 towards the total project cost of \$1,598,760.00. The remaining commitment is contingent upon the Avery County School Board offering to pay up to a possible \$200,000 and \$350,000 from lottery funds.

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Tim Phillips to adopt the Budget Amendment for the Crossnore Elementary Roof Project in the amount of \$1,048,760.00 with a debit of \$365,672.00 to Avery County Schools Capital Outlay (107000.6115); credit of \$365,672.00 to Fund Balance Appropriated (103990.0000); debit of \$683,088.00 to Cash Account (101020.0000); credit of \$683,088.00 to Transfer to General Fund (103903.0000) and a debit of \$683,088.00 to Transfer to General Fund (466600.8540) and a credit of \$683,088.00 to Capital Reserve—NCCMT (461046.0000). Motion unanimous with those in attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

#### **County Attorney Report – Michaelle Poore**

Nothing to report at this time.

**Approval of Minutes**

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Dennis Aldridge to approve the June 1, 2020 Regular Meeting; June 8, 2020 Recessed Meeting; June 15, 2020 Regular Meeting; June 15, 2020 Closed Session. Motion unanimous with those in attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

**Agenda Consent Items**

Adopted by Consensus of the Board.

**Upcoming Meetings**

The next Regular Meeting will be August 3, 2020 at 3:30 p.m. The second monthly meeting for July may be cancelled.

**Adjourn**

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Dennis Aldridge to adjourn this meeting at 4:43 p.m. Motion unanimous with those in attendance (4-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye.**

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**Martha Hicks, Chair**  
**Avery County Board of Commissioners**

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk