

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
January 18, 2022

PUBLIC CONCERNS – None

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, January 18, 2022 at 6:00 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson, Commissioner David Gambill, Commissioner Eddie Settle and Commissioner Brian S. Minton.

Also present for the meeting were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Keith Elmore welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at this time.

INVOCATION – Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson led the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chairman Keith Elmore led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion was made by Commissioner Brian S. Minton, seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on January 4, 2022.

CLEAN UP WILKES – UPDATE – Chairman Elmore welcomed and recognized Cindy Mittet. Ms. Mittet thanked the Board for inviting Clean Up Wilkes tonight. She stated the new year's quote for the group is "Knowledge is Power, Community is Strength, and a Positive Attitude is Everything". Ms. Mittet said when they do clean ups it takes no time for trash to reappear. In the past 4 years they have learned a big source of the problem is commercial trucks and residential vehicles transporting trash. She stated they are asking the Commissioners to pass a new Solid Waste Ordinance and to enforce it. The one they have now is from 2007 and is very vague and needs to be tightened up. Ms. Mittet added Clean Up Wilkes likes to work with the county and will continue to do so. They want to keep it clean, healthy, and looking the best they can for future generations.

Chairman Elmore asked if they are wanting them to update the Solid Waste Ordinance. Ms. Mittet replied yes. Chairman Elmore asked Mr. Triplett if he has discussed this with them. Mr. Triplett replied he has not. Ms. Mittet added she has heard it mentioned before that this is needed. Chairman Elmore asked if they have been working with Anderia Byrd. Ms. Byrd replied yes, she has worked with Ms. Mittet through Clean Up Wilkes and the Wilkes County Litter Committee. Chairman Elmore stated they need to discuss this and see what changes are needed. Mr. Triplett said this Ordinance along with every other Ordinance they have will have to come before the Board of Commissioners. A change in new State Laws passed will require them to revisit all the Ordinances to include Solid Waste. He added legal provisions changed in

how they can enforce ordinances through criminal provisions and new planning statutes that will require this. They do not address this particular issue of Solid Waste, but it is an opportunity to work on this.

Ms. Mittet stated this is not the complete solution, but it is important, when people realize they are serious about it this will help. Chairman Elmore stated they need to set up a meeting with Clean Up Wilkes, representatives from this Board, and Ms. Byrd to see what they can do. Commissioner Gambill said they were discussing this earlier and he has never seen it this bad. He picks up trash in front of his house and while commuting to Ashe everyday he sees trash everywhere. Commissioner Gambill said they see commercial trucks loosing trash as they drive down the road, trash is becoming a big problem. Ms. Mittet said they have 975 good members that want to make a change and don't like seeing all the trash.

Commissioner Settle said this is a statewide problem everywhere, he is Chairman of the Environment Committee for the NCACC and his top objective is to keep trash off the roads along with discussing water. Ms. Mittet said that is why she is here she needs to make a stand and help make a difference. Commissioner Settle stated when he was Chairman they wrote a letter to the Governor, 3 years ago they stopped the inmates from picking up trash and the response back was it was inhumane. They need legislation to address this. Ms. Mittet agreed it is a statewide issue, but a few people can make a big change. Commissioner Minton added he applauds them for all their volunteer efforts, and all they do. Every time he has been out with them to pick up trash he has enjoyed it and challenges everyone to go out with Clean up Wilkes and pickup trash. Commissioner Settle asked if they still have the Adopt a Road Program. Ms. Mittet replied yes, DOT is really good to them, they call about a pick-up and get great support from them. She added the next step needed is from trucks with trash blowing out. In Florida they enforced huge fines for trash and there is none, it works.

Chairman Elmore stated they need to attack this issue several ways. Vice Chairman Johnson said he attended the litter committee meeting and education is needed, updating the Ordinance has to be a part of it, enforcement, and clean ups will still be needed. He added the County appropriated money for clean ups a few years ago to help with this. NC DOT is supposed to do pickups as well, but they seem to be behind. Chairman Elmore said they will move forward with setting up a meeting.

Chairman Elmore and the Board thanked Ms. Mittet for the great job they do.

HIGH COUNTRY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

1. UPDATE – Chairman Elmore welcomed and recognized Keith Deveraux, Director. Mr. Deveraux thanked the Board and handed out a packet of information. He added the packet has updates that include all the great things going on along with the progress report for High Country Workforce from July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021. Mr. Deveraux said the Workforce Board covers the 7 Counties of the High Country that include Alleghany, Ashe, Wilkes, Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, and Yancy. The issue he wants to update the Board on is the NC Works Commission, which is the Workforce Board for the State of NC they are in the

process of doing a study. On November 20, 2021 the NC Works Commission Chair announced that they would conduct a realignment policy review. He added the models put forward for this study includes presentations being made that realigns and consolidates Workforce Boards. Currently there are 23 Workforce Boards in NC and he does not think this is too many considering the geographic area of the state. They are looking at realigning and consolidating 23 Workforce Boards down to 8, which follows the 8 prosperity zones. Mr. Deveraux stated this will eliminate 15 Workforce Boards which are appointed by duly elected representative from the County Governments. This takes away local decision making and local control from the elections officials that Citizens voted to represent them. He added the results of this study will be provided by the NC Works Commission at their meeting on February 9, 2022. They are to present the findings of this study and make a recommendation. There will be a called meeting in March of the NC Works Commission to vote on the realignment policy, then a realignment letter from the Governor will be generated on the new policy to take effect July 1, 2023.

Mr. Deveraux said the model they have been provided takes the High Country Workforce Development Board and merges with Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. Which includes Catawba, Caldwell, Burke and Alexander Counties. The HCCOG have adopted a Resolution and sent it to the Governor, NC Works Commission, and Secretary of Commerce that they are not in support of the Workforce boundaries changing. They have done a great job and need to keep the Workforce Regional to the 7 Counties. He added if it's not broke why fix it? They are serving big and small businesses, helping job seekers, and producing a qualified skilled workforce to help meet the needs of businesses. Mr. Deveraux stated if they put rural counties in with metropolitan, the rural counties will not get the attention or service they need. They need to tell NC Works Commission, the Governor, and Secretary of Commerce to keep the High Country Workforce Development Region in the 7 counties that have common interest and success.

2. RESOLUTION ON STATEWIDE WORKFORCE BOARD REALIGNMENT – Mr. Deveraux said on behalf of the High Country Workforce Development Board and the High Country Workforce Consortium he is asking for the Boards support of this Resolution. It states they support and would like for the Workforce local area to remain in the 7 county region as it is currently. The High Country Council of Governments, which Commissioner Eddie Settle serves on, is in favor of this and sent out the resolution templet for your consideration. Commissioner Gambill said he supports this, and ask if he has spoken with others that will be consolidated that will be affected much more than Wilkes with the realignment. Mr. Deveraux replied he has not heard of any Board that is in favor of the realignment and consolidation. He added there are some that have consolidated willingly and wanted to join another one. His issue is they are taking away the local decision making, and control from the local elected officials that know what is best for their area. Commissioner Gambill agreed. Commissioner Settle stated it was unanimous at the HCCOG and Wilkes is the largest of the 7 in this region. Hickory would be in the new district and the larger counties will benefit and all the smaller ones will suffer. Mr. Deveraux added some of the NC Works Centers may close, they have 7 one in each county and feel this is very important and does not think this will continue in the new model. He said the HCCOG will lose over \$2 million to their budget if this changes as well, they will not be the fiscal entity any longer. Chairman Elmore said there

was a purpose and reason in the beginning that they came up with the 23 Workforce Development areas. He would like to know what has changed and the logic behind this. If there were issues in some areas it does not make sense to do this in all, especially the ones it is working well for.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to adopt the Resolution on Statewide Workforce Board Realignment as requested and presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Eddie Settle and unanimously approved.

WILKES COUNTY
RESOLUTION ON STATEWIDE WORKFORCE BOARD REALIGNMENT

A resolution of Wilkes County formally requesting the North Carolina Department of Commerce, NC Works Commission, retain the boundaries of the High Country Local Workforce Development Area in its final recommendations for statewide realignment of Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs)/Local Workforce Development Boards. The High Country Local Workforce Development Area is comprised of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties. Wilkes County does not support any final recommendation that separates these seven counties, merges them into larger areas, or consolidates other LWDAs into the High Country.

WHEREAS, the High Country Local Workforce Development Area is the designated planning and administrative area to receive funds from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey Counties; and

WHEREAS, the High Country Workforce Development Consortium members, comprised of Local Elected Officials, are the designated recipients of WIOA funds for the High Country LWDA and charged with the oversight and implementation of WIOA programs and activities within the High Country LWDA; and

WHEREAS, the High Country Workforce Development Consortium appoints the members of the High Country Workforce Development Board, and selects the High Country Local Workforce Development Area Fiscal Agent and Administrative Entity for the area; and

WHEREAS, the High Country Workforce Development Consortium supports local and regional workforce solutions to address common issues or opportunities, coordinate state and federal program service delivery in the High Country Workforce Development Area, and build strategic partnerships to improve the prosperity of the seven counties within the consortium; and

WHEREAS, the High Country Local Workforce Development Area was designated by the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions based on factors such as common community growth patterns anchored by metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, shared labor pools, commuting patterns, coordinated economic development strategies, regional alignment with state and federal programs and services, and empowered to carry out programs and services

that are of mutual interests to member governments within the High Country Workforce Local Workforce Development Area; and

WHEREAS, the High Country Council of Governments serves as the fiscal agent and administrative entity for WIOA programs; and

WHEREAS, the High Country Council of Governments serves as the designated Economic Development District (EDD) through the U.S. Department of Commerce: Economic Development Administration (EDA); and

WHEREAS, the High Country Workforce Development Consortium, the High Country Workforce Development Board, and the High Country Council of Governments work together to align the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to improve the High Country Local Workforce Development Area's workforce infrastructure, and to provide a skilled workforce for area job seekers and employers,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Wilkes County formally requests to retain its current designation, geographic boundary, and appointed entities to carry out WIOA programs and activities, and that we do not support any final recommendation that separates these seven counties, merges them into larger areas, or consolidates other LWDA's into the High Country Local Workforce Development Area.

Adopted by Wilkes County on this 18th day of January, 2022.

*Gideon Keith Elmore Chairman
Wilkes County Board of Commissioners*

Attest:

Sarah D. Call Clerk to the Board

HEALTH DEPARTMENT – BOARD OF HEALTH APPOINTMENT – Chairman Elmore recognized Rachel Willard Heather Director. Ms. Willard stated the Wilkes County Board of Health would like to recommend Dr. Laura Hubbard for a vacancy as the physician to serve on the Board of Health. Dr. Joe Fesperman served 9 years on the board and will not be eligible to renew his term. Ms. Willard said the Board of Health has approved this appointment and would like to recommend Dr. Laura Hubbard to serve as the physician representative on the Board of Health pending approval from this Board.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to approve the appointment of Dr. Laura Hubbard to the Wilkes County Board of Health as requested and presented a tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

Chairman Elmore asked for an update on Covid. Ms. Willard replied it is running rampant, it is higher than last January; 28.3% positive today the highest since March 2020; State is 33%.

Chairman Elmore added they are at the highest level to date and have vaccines. Commissioner Gambill stated he just had Covid for the second time, this was milder, and he is vaccinated. It was much like a cold other than loss of energy, is this what they are seeing. Ms. Willard stated as of December they have had 800 breakthrough cases which is those that have been vaccinated which is not bad, they have over 14,000 cases. She added they only had 4 deaths in the past two weeks with the Omicron variant, it will go up a little. Most people are having the upper respiratory, congestion, watery eyes and more like a sinus infection symptom. She said is it lasting 2 days and then they feel better. Ms. Willard said by federal rules they are testing employees differently now and on day 5 they are testing negative.

Chairman Elmore said it is his understanding they can apply online and 4 tests will be sent to your home. Ms. Willard replied there is a link through USPS, they just put in their information and will received 4 free tests in about 12 days. She added insurance will now cover 8 test per month per person. Chairman Elmore ask how the home test work. Ms. Willard said she does not know the type of test they are sending out, normally it is a 15-20 minute turn around to know the results. Commissioner Gambill stated the home test are not being recognized are they, not sure why they are doing this, maybe so the folks will self quarantine. He added employers are not recognizing home tests, a provider is required from his experience.

Chairman Elmore asked the vaccination rate in Wilkes. Ms. Willard replied 47%, the state cannot give them a percentage of who has had an additional dose vs. a booster dose. Nationwide about 50% of those eligible for a booster have gotten it and she imagines it's about the same in Wilkes. Commissioner Settle asked if the CDC has changed their guidelines and says this now needs to be treated more like the flu. He attended a very large event in Elkin over the weekend, the CEO of Elkin Hospital stated they are entering an End-Demic and should be there by the end of February. He was very excited and happy to hear this. Ms. Willard replied they hope this variant provides enough immunity in the community to provide herd immunity. She feels that by the end of this school year it will be treated more like flu and with the CDC going to 5 days instead of 10 helps. They expect to have a Tamiflu for Covid, folks will be out for 5 days until the antivirals are done and then go back.

Commissioner Gambill stated they have to wonder if they would have kept going and never shut down to begin with where would they be now, possible better off today. Vice Chairman Johnson asked if Wilkes County will peak in the next few weeks. Ms. Willard replied she had said around Martin Luther King weekend, given it is continuing to spread at this rate they need to pushed it back two weeks. She thinks they are almost there. The hospital is seeing flu on top of this and another respiratory illness, a lot is going around that is overwhelming health care at this time. Chairman Elmore asked about the hospital. Ms. Willard replied she does not know specifically about Wilkes, but Atrium Enterprise is at maximum compacity. Commissioner Minton stated he thinks some places are starting to recognize the home test if you do a video call with the provider at the time you do the test. Ms. Willard added the school system recognizes home tests. If folks call the Health Department and did a home test they take all the information and enter it as a case and the state is recognizing it as well. They give them all the documentation they need from the Health Department to say they are positive. Commissioner

Gambill stated that is a double edge sword and could have false numbers as well. Ms. Willard agreed.

Chairman Elmore and the Board thanked Ms. Willard for the update.

TAX DEPARTMENT:

1. TAX RELEASES – LISTING – Chairman Elmore welcomed and recognized Will Lankford, Tax Administrator. Mr. Lankford asked the Board to approve the 33 tax releases for listing in the amount of \$13,662.62. He added these covers the months of November, December and a small portion of January.

Commissioner Brian S. Minton made a motion to approve the tax releases for listing as presented. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

A detailed listing of tax releases is maintained in the Wilkes County Tax Administrator's office.

2. EXTENSION OF THE LISTING PERIOD – Tax Administrator Will Lankford stated North Carolina General Statute Section 105-307 is entitled the "Length of Listing Period; Extension; Preliminary Work". He stated this Statute gives the Board of County Commissioners the authority to extend the listing period by thirty (30) days. He is requesting that the Board extend the listing period until March 1, 2022. Mr. Lankford stated the statute also allows the County Commissioners to grant "individual extensions of time for the listing of real and personal property upon written request and for good cause shown"; the statute allows the Commissioners to delegate this authority to the Tax Administrator. Mr. Lankford stated the extensions granted under this paragraph shall not extend beyond April 15, 2022 unless it falls on a weekend. He requested the Board delegate the authority to grant the individual extensions to the Tax Administrator.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to approve the request to extend the listing period until March 1, 2022 and to delegate the authority under North Carolina General Statute Section 105-307 to the Tax Administrator to grant individual extensions of time for the listing of real and personal property until April 15, 2022 as requested and presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

Chairman Elmore asked about the revaluation. Mr. Lankford replied it is scheduled for January 1, 2023 and they have already started working on the sales revaluation in the appraisal department. He added the values in the 2019 revaluation carry forward until a new revaluation unless there is a change to the property. He is looking for someone to hire as a consultant as they normally do for the revaluation, but having a hard time funding someone that is not already committed to another county. Chairman Elmore said the labor shortage is affecting everyone. He asked if next year's budget 2022-23 is when it will go into effect. Mr. Lankford replied yes, and added the sales data they are collecting is very strong in Wilkes. Chairman Elmore thanked Mr. Lankford for all they do.

NEW BUSINESS – Commissioner Settle stated he has heard from all over the county and does not know what has happened with the road scraping during this snow. He has had many calls from folks wanting to know why their road is not scraped. This is not something that the County Offices handle, road scraping is handled by NC DOT. Commissioner Settle added the roads are scraped at the Surry County line and does not know why, but they are. He has had many calls about this issue today. They do not know what has happen maybe it is a shortage of drivers or people with Covid. This Board does not control scraping of the roads. Chairman Elmore said there was one contract road scraper truck that broke a hydraulic hose and sat on his road all day. He stated they can send a note over to DOT and see if they can find out what happen. Commissioner Gambill added they are probably dealing with Covid as everyone, then folks drive on it and will not stay home, and it is very hard to scrap after that. Commissioner Minton stated it is a struggle that most do not understand, his Dad worked for DOT for many years. Every time it snowed as a kid he recalls he left in the middle of night to plow the streets and did whatever was needed for days at a time.

CLOSED SESSION – Commissioner Brian S. Minton a motion to go into Closed Session under Section 143-318.11(a)(3) of the North Carolina General Statute and to consult with and give instructions to the Board’s attorneys regarding the Opioid Litigation currently pending in which the County is a Plaintiff; and under Section 143-318.11(a)(3) of the North Carolina General Statutes to consult with the Board’s attorney to preserve the attorney-client privilege; and under Section 143-318.11 (a)(4) of the North Carolina General Statutes to discuss the location or expansion of business in Wilkes County. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

Motion was made by Commissioner David Gambill, seconded by Commissioner Eddie Settle and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn back into regular session. No action was taken in the closed session.

NEW BUSINESS – COMMITTEE – WILKES COUNTY RURAL COMMUNITY WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE EXENSION – Chairman Elmore stated they need to appoint a committee. Mr. Yates said they need to appoint a Committee for the Rural Community Wastewater Infrastructure Extension and would like to suggest Wilson Hooper, Marc Hauser, Chairman Elmore, Vice Chairman Johnson, and himself.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to appoint Wilson Hooper, Marc Hauser, Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Casey Joe Johnson, and John Yates to a Committee for the Wilkes County Rural Community Wastewater Infrastructure Extension as presented a tonight’s meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

ADJOURN – Motion was made by Commissioner Eddie Settle, seconded by Commissioner David Gambill and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 7:37 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk
Chairman

Giddeon Keith Elmore,

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: February 1, 2022