

**MINUTES  
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
March 5, 2020**

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Thursday, March 5, 2020 at 6:00 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Eddie Settle, Vice Chairman David Gambill, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner Gary D. Blevins, 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 Eddie Settle welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. He asked everyone to remember Dwight Byrd who is very sick and in Baptist Hospital.

**INVOCATION** – Vice Chairman David Gambill led the Invocation.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** – Chairman Settle led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES** - Motion was made by Commissioner Keith Elmore, seconded by Commissioner Brain S. Minton and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on February 18, 2020.

**BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS** – Motion was made by Commissioner Keith Elmore to approve Budget Amendment No. 26 (Health – Programs – Wilkes County BCCCP program received funds from the state in the amount of \$8,125 to provide additional screening mammograms for underinsured/uninsured women of Wilkes County. No county money involved; and Departmental Line-Item Transfer Request No. 1 (Social Services – IV-D Child Support Legal Services funds of \$19,732 was budgeted for contract legal services, but now a Staff Attorney is needed. No additional County funds requested). The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman David Gambill and unanimously approved.

**HIGH COUNTRY COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS – PRESENTATION** – Chairman Settle recognized and welcomed Julie Wiggins, Executive Director and Phil Trew, Director of Planning & Development. Ms. Wiggins thanked the Board and said she would like to give a brief overview of the COG, how they operate, the program areas, how they are funded, and how they are governed. She gave a background on how the COG's were formed and the services they provide. They are one of 16 COGS's in the state and serve 7 counties and 19 municipalities. Ms. Wiggins said they are governed by a member from each local government, Commissioner Gary Blevins has served on their Board for over 11 years, 3 years of this as chair and is on the advisory committee. She added he has just finished a Chairmanship of the COG Association Forum; Wilkes County is very well represented at the High Country and throughout the state.

Ms. Wiggins said they are primarily funded by federal dollars with a component of local dollars that provide the match. They are designated by various departments to be the official entity to administrator certain services which include: Economic Development Administration; Department of Health and Human Services; Appalachian Regional Commission; Department of Transportation; and Department of Labor. She added, she would like to talk about two of their departments next and Mr. Trew will talk about planning.

Ms. Wiggins stated they have the Area Agency on Aging and gave a brief background in this. She said they administrator the Home and Community Care Block Grant for Wilkes County of \$632,000. Those funds help support Wilkes Senior Resources, BROCC, and Ruby Pardue Blackburn Adult Daycare Center. They also have Workforce Development and the value of this for Wilkes County is \$305,000. She gave a brief background of what they provide to Wilkes citizens and employers. Ms. Wiggins said Workforce Development has a consortium and a county commissioner from the 7 county's serve, and Commissioner Elmore serves as the Chief Elected Official. They also have a Workforce Development Board with Lynette Bang from Tyson and Jim Coleman from Infusion Point serving for Wilkes. Ms. Wiggins said there is a Senior Tarheel Legislature that also serves as the Regional Aging Advisory Committee, Kenneth Foster is the delegate and Ormond Loomis is the alternate.

Ms. Wiggins said they oversee the Community Advisory Committees for long term care, which is the volunteer groups that are the eyes and ears for the one Ombudsman for Long Term Care at the COG. This Board appoints those folks as well and currently Wilkes has vacancies for the Adult Care Home Committee and the Nursing Home Committees. Commissioner Blevins said these positions are hard to fill and all counties have vacancies. He added the COG needs to come up with a strategy to figure out how to find, select, and recruit volunteers for these committees. Ms. Wiggins added the Commissioners appoint committee members once a year and BROCC serves as the Lead Agent. This committee determines who and where the block grant funds are used as far as providers, what or who is funded, and what services. She said through the planning department they have the Rural Planning Organization which is transportation planning. Commissioner Brian Minton servers on the advisory committee (TAC), the manager and DOT serve on the (TCC) which is the coordinating committee. Ms. Wiggins said they also have Region D Development Corporation which is their sister non-profit. They have funds to loan money to small business in Wilkes and if they know of anyone let them know.

Ms. Wiggins said as mentioned they are primarily federally funded with local match requirements. She added the local dues are crucial to them being able to get and match the federal grant funds. It has been 23 years since they have had an increase in the dues, the goal is to make the dues commensurate with the local match requirements. Ms. Wiggins stated they have discussed phasing the increase in over 3 years, Wilkes County would need to increase their dues by \$11,646 additional for each of the next 3 years. Commissioner Elmore asked if they could provide the budget or the comparison from the other 7 counties for them. Ms. Wiggins replied yes. Commissioner Blevins added it is based on population and Wilkes is the largest. Commissioner Elmore asked if the Towns' pay dues. Commissioner Blevins replied yes all 26 do. Chairman Settle stated this is an increase of \$11,000 per year for 3 years with a total of \$33,000. Ms. Wiggins replied correct, assuming the population estimates stay the same with the

census coming up, and the match requirements stay the same. Commissioner Elmore asked if Wilkes helped when the COG purchased their office location that they have now or had an increase at that time. Ms. Wiggins replied she is not familiar with that, but she will look into it. The dues have been about the same for 23 years with the exception of when they added the Rural Planning Organization and is based on population. Commissioner Blevins said the 27 member Board discussed this at length and the decision was made that they have no choice but to increase the dues. Commissioner Elmore asked if the federal funding has increased, they haven't gone 23 years without pay increases or adding staff. Ms. Wiggins said that has been achieved from a variety of sources to include new programs. Commissioner Blevins added they administrator many programs with most of the funds passing through and they get a very small percentage for their administration.

Chairman Settle stated there has been no increase in dues since 1997 and asked where does the dues go. Ms. Wiggins replied the dues goes to the general fund and are allocated to match the federal grants. Vice Chairman Gambill asked the total amount the dues are increasing for the regional, if Wilkes is \$33,000 what is the total. Ms. Wiggins replied this year they brought in \$124,555 they need just over \$200,000. Vice Chairman Gambill asked if the new dues will get them to \$200K. Ms. Wiggins replied not in one year, if all are agreeable they will get there over time. She added they are looking for other opportunities and getting ready to sign a lease to rent out part of their building.

Mr. Trew provided an update for what their planning and development department does. He added there are 6 in those departments and the dues help pay their salaries. They do lots of grant applications and also help to administer the grants secured. In addition, they do land use plans, comprehensive plans, parks and rec plans, economic development planning, zoning ordinance, transportation planning that started in 2002 and work closely with DOT on getting local projects funded. They also provide GIS and computer mapping services. Mr. Trew said in the past few years they have worked on the Mulberry School sewer line project, Home Rehabilitation grant, Project ADMIT for Wilkes County Schools, and the water line in Ronda on Hwy 268. They work closely and also help Wilkes Community College, Wilkes Economic Development Corp., Soil & Water Conservation District, and Yadkin Valley Greenway. He added they have helped Wilkes with GIS mapping recently as well as updating the addressing system for Wilkes Communications Center. They also worked on Fire Districts and aligning the fire tax, fire insurance, and response districts into one that is much easier to manager. Chairman Settle and the Board stated they did a great job on those projects that would not have been completed without their GIS department.

Mr. Trew stated in transportation they do long range planning and worked with DOT in 2017 to develop a comprehensive transportation plan that covers all modes of transportation. It sets the foundation so that projects can be funded. They also helped with local coordinated plans to help them apply for federal funding for elderly and disabled transportation. Mr. Trew went over the projects that have been approved for funding from the DOT and the estimated completion date. He briefly went over the projects that have been submitted in hopes to receive funding, and they do this every other year. He added new projects will be submitted for prioritization in March 2021. Commissioner Elmore asked the status of the superstreet. Mr. Trew replied the right-of

ways are in process and as of now the construction is scheduled to start in 2022. Mr. Yates stated they have discussed at the next prioritization they will try to get the Hwy. 268 four-lane project added from Airport Road to Rock Creek Road in sections until they can eventually get it all the way to Elkin. He said DOT has told them it will score better in segments and that is the plan for the next prioritization submission. Chairman Settle asked if there is any news on the Airport runway extension. Mr. Yates replied it is on the STIP and they are still working on justification with the FAA. Mr. Trew said there are several projects at the Airport that is being worked on.

Commissioner Blevins said he drove up Hwy. 18 and looked at the sewer project, the construction company has done a nice job on that project it looks really good. He added the COG and that company have done a great job. Mr. Trew said he will pass that along to the engineer, they will be happy to hear that. Commissioner Blevins stated they did a great job with the fire tax and insurance districts and made Tony Triplett's life so much better. They would not have gotten the local bill without Jessica Welborn and her work. Mr. Triplett agreed, she did a great job. Mr. Trew said it was tough decisions the Board had to make and took lots of time and work, but was well with it.

Mr. Triplett stated all counties have to adopt a comprehensive land use plan, weather they have county wide zoning or not. He added Wilkes does not have that and will have until mid-2022 to complete it. He asked if this is something the COG can help with. Mr. Trew replied absolutely they can. Mr. Triplett said they also have to complete and adopt a comprehensive land use plan this year. Mr. Trew replied they can help with that as well. Commissioner Elmore asked if the Planning Department is working in this now. Mr. Triplett said they have been discussing this.

Commissioner Elmore asked how many they have on staff at the COG. Ms. Wiggins replied 21. Commissioner Elmore said they do a lot with 21 employees. Ms. Wiggins agreed and added she is very impressed with the dedication and amount of work they do, they go above and beyond. Commissioner Elmore said their experience with the High County and they staff has been very positive they do a good job.

The Board thanked Ms. Wiggins and Mr. Trew for the presentation. Ms. Wiggins and Mr. Trew thanked the Board for their time and support.

#### **EMS – MOUNTAIN VIEW BASE:**

**1. LEASE AGREEMENT** – County Attorney Tony Triplett said they have been discussing this for a long time. He added the Board of Education and Mtn. View Ruritan has both approved this and it is now before the Board for final approval. There is a lease agreement and two easements, for septic and temporary construction which require separate approvals. Mr. Triplett said the lease agreement is just as they have discussed, the base will be located on property from both the School and Ruritan Club. He added this is a 99 year lease and the county have the right to get out at any time with 180 days' notice, it has lots of flexibility and \$1 per year rent. They have agreed to pave the drive way entrance to the Ruritan Club and after that the maintenance obligations switch over to the parties depending on who's property the pavement is

on. Mr. Triplett said the paving along with construction of their EMS substation base is their obligations.

Commissioner Elmore asked if the county took the 180 day out, will the building go to the Ruritan Club. Mr. Triplett replied under the lease the county has an obligation to remove the building unless they reach an agreement with the Ruritan. Commissioner Elmore asked if they have to remove it. Mr. Triplett replied unless they reach and agreement with the Ruritan they do have to remove it.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to approve the Lease Agreement with The Wilkes County Board of Education, Mtn. View Ruritan Club, Inc. and Wilkes County as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

**2. SEPTIC EASEMENT** – Mr. Triplett stated the next document is the septic easement with the Board of Education in which they have given the County an easement to install the required septic system and line. The easement has a map attached that shows where this will be located, he added.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to approve the Septic Easement and Right-of-Way Agreement for Septic/Wastewater System with The Wilkes County Board of Education and Wilkes County as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman David Gambill and unanimously approved.

**3. TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION EASEMENT** – Mr. Triplett said this is for a Temporary Construction Easement so that the Base can be constructed on the property. This is a one year standard agreement that will be dated March 1, 2020, and all the documents approved tonight will be dated March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Vice Chairman David Gambill made a motion to approve the Temporary Construction Easement with The Wilkes County Board of Education, Mtn. View Ruritan Club, Inc. and Wilkes County as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously approved.

**RECESS** – Chairman Settle declared the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners recessed at 6:57 P.M.

**RECONVENE** – Chairman Settle reconvened the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 7:00 P.M. on Thursday, March 5, 2020.

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATE** – Chairman Settle welcomed and recognized John Blevins, DSS Director. Mr. Blevins said first he would like to go over excel spreadsheet that shows where the foster parents are in process that they will do each month. These are folks that have applied to be a foster parent. Mr. Blevins went over the columns and form at this time. Commissioner Elmore asked on line 11 where it says book 6 what are they

referring to. Mr. Blevins replied there are 6 books they have to go through on their own and in that case they are on the last book in the process. He stated someone had asked last month how long does it take to get them licensed and it takes on average 8 months. They can go at their own pace, some go quicker and some longer, there are many meetings and classes they have to attend. Commissioner Elmore stated then there is an update after that. Mr. Blevins replied yes they have classes and things they have to do and work on to keep the license, it is tough. Vice Chairman Gambill said they have home inspections as well and asked how often they have to do this. Mr. Blevins replied they go through these at the beginning before they are licensed and yearly after that. Vice Chairman Gambill asked who sets the standards. Mr. Blevins replied the state, they do not require any more requirements than the state says they have to. Commissioner Blevins said they were told last week at a Legislative luncheon at the COG that the state was going to increase the pay for foster parents. Mr. Blevins said the budget they are working on now has the old rates, this is good to know. Commissioner Blevins said they need to contact the association and see what their position is on this and where it stands. Vice Chairman Gambill stated Wilkes County pays \$50 more than the state currently and should be one of the highest. Mr. Blevins said he will follow up on this.

Mr. Blevins went over the monthly caseload report for January. He added they currently have a 17 year old child that they have had for 10 days. She will turn 18 next week and they have not been able to find anywhere to place her. Mr. Blevins said two social workers are with her 24/7 and this is very hard on the staff. This week alone they had this child and two more earlier, and last night they had her and a 16 year old. Mr. Blevins said they have had 16 social workers that worked shifts from 5 PM until 8:30 AM the next morning keeping these children. He added placement is getting very difficult due to certain behaviors and some are full. Mr. Blevins said since the first of this year they have been dealing with this and they can't leave them and must stay with them. Commissioner Blevins said this is one of those unfunded mandates from the state when they changed the age and now 16 and 17 year old are not treated as adults. It was probably a good law, but this was not anticipated when they made that change in the law and no system was put in place to deal with this. Mr. Blevins said since the first of this fiscal year they have stayed with kids 43 nights. He added this is two months out of this fiscal year. This is creating two issues one is comp time going through the roof and the second is they are losing staff, they are getting burned out and stressed out. Commissioner Blevins said they are going to have to come up with some accommodations for this in the future. Mr. Blevins said they have folks working on this every day and trying to help the young lady as best they can and offering all the resource they have.

Mr. Blevins next he went through the Adoption Services financial report, Child Development and Subsidized Child Care financial reports for January. He said as of the end of February they had 128 parents with 160 children that they have worked to move off the child care waiting list. He added of this 128, 22 vouchers were issued, 9 were over the income guidelines, 75 were no shows, 9 had pending applications, and 13 they were waiting to hear back from. They currently have 95 children on the wait list. Mr. Blevins went through the CPS Foster Care monthly report for January. He said the kinship/relative placement has dropped. There are several that could not be approved due to CPS history, some had criminal backgrounds, and in some cases the parents did not want them due to fighting among themselves, and a few said they could not

take on any more responsibility because these are not paid. Vice Chairman Gambill asked if they could offer them some money. Mr. Blevins said they could, but all the funds would come from the county. Commissioner Elmore said the foster home pay is from federal and state. Mr. Blevins said that is correct. Vice Chairman Gambill said they need to meet and come up with a plan for the emergency placements and kinship to see what they can do to help on both of these. Mr. Blevins thanked the Board for their support and said if they can come up with something they will let them know.

The Board thanked Mr. Blevins for the update.

**BLUE RIDGE OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION, INC. MARCH FOR MEALS PROCLAMATION** – County Manager John Yates stated they received a request from BROCC to participate in the 18<sup>th</sup> annual March for Meals campaign celebrating over 40 years of senior nutrition programs. They are requesting the Board to proclaim March 2020 March for Meals Month and join with them as they bring awareness and support to both congregate and Meals on Wheels program that bring vital nutrition and services to the seniors of Wilkes County. He added the Proclamation is attached for the Board's consideration.

Vice Chairman David Gambill made a motion to approve the Proclamation Proclaiming March 2020 as the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual March for Meals Month as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously approved.

*A PROCLAMATION PROCLAIMING MARCH 2020 AS THE  
18<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL MARCH FOR MEALS MONTH*

*WHEREAS, on March 22, 1972, President Richard Nixon signed into law a measure that amended the Older Americans Act of 1965 and established a national nutrition program for seniors 60 years and older; and*

*WHEREAS, Meals on Wheels America established the March for Meals campaign in March 2002 to recognize the historic month, the importance of the Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs, both congregate and home-delivered, and raise awareness about the escalating problem of senior hunger in America; and*

*WHEREAS, the 2020 observance of March for Meals celebrates 18 years of providing an opportunity to support Meals on Wheels programs that deliver vital and critical services by donating, volunteering and raising awareness about senior hunger and isolation; and*

*WHEREAS, Meals on Wheels programs – both congregate and home-delivered, in Wilkes County, North Carolina have served our communities admirably for more than 40 years; and*

*WHEREAS, volunteers for Meals on Wheels programs in Wilkes County are the backbone of the program and they not only deliver nutritious meals to seniors and individuals with disabilities who are at significant risk of hunger and isolation, but also caring concern and attention to their welfare; and*

*WHEREAS, Meals on Wheels programs in Wilkes County provide nutritious meals to seniors that help them maintain their health and independence, thereby preventing unnecessary falls, hospitalizations and/or premature institutionalization; and*

*WHEREAS, Meals on Wheels programs in Wilkes County provide a powerful socialization opportunity for millions of seniors to help combat the negative health effects and economic consequences of loneliness and isolation; and*

*WHEREAS, Meals on Wheels programs in Wilkes County deserve recognition for the contributions they have made and will continue to make to local communities, our State and our Nation.*

*NOW, THEREFORE, I Eddie Settle, as Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of Wilkes County, North Carolina do hereby proclaim March 2020 as the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual March for Meals Month and urge every citizen to take this month to honor our Meals on Wheels programs, the seniors they serve and the volunteers who care for them. Our recognition of, and involvement in, the national 2020 March for Meals can enrich our entire community and help combat senior hunger and isolation in America.*

*Dated this 5<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2020*

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*Eddie Settle Chairman, Wilkes County Board of Commissioners*

**N.C DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – ROADWAY ABANDONMENT REQUEST – APPROVAL** – County Manager John Yates stated the County has received a letter from North Carolina Department of Transportation that stated: *This office has received a petition (Form SR-3) requesting the consideration of the abandonment of the last 0.13 mi of (Pardue Farm Road) to the State Maintenance System. If is required that the County Commissioner demonstrate approval of this process. After the approval is sent back to our District Office, property information research, along with road investigation will follow.* Mr. Yates said this was approved by the Board a few meetings back and DOT did their due diligence they found that it is only the last 0.13 mile and they sent it back to the Board for a second approval.

Commissioner Gary D. Blevins made a motion to approve the Roadway Abandonment request for the last 0.13 mile of Pardue Farm Road as requested. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously approved.

**OLD BUSINESS** – Chairman Settle stated they want to let everyone know they are equipped for the hearing impaired during the Board of Commissioner Meetings and have head phones for anyone that needs assistance.

**NEW BUSINESS** – Commissioner Blevins stated they would like to congratulate Mr. Casey Joe Johnson on winning the primary on Tuesday against some tough competition. Vice Chairman Gambill said he was the youngest Commissioner to win in Wilkes County. He added Mr. Johnson will hold that record if he wins the general election he will be 29 at that time. Commissioner Blevins added if he wins in November he looks forward to passing off his seat to him. Commissioner Elmore stated he would like to add congratulations and mentioned he is here at the meeting, taking notes and learning, and would like to commend him for that. He added there were very good folks that ran, he got to travel around and meet a lot of their family and was very impressed by the people that ran.

**ADJOURN** - Motion was made by Commissioner Keith Elmore, seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 7:30 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Eddie Settle, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: March 17, 2020