

**MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
June 2, 2020**

PUBLIC HEARING – REQUEST BY MILLERS CREEK VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, INC. FOR FIRE TAX RATE INCREASES IN FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021 BUDGET – Chairman Eddie Settle declared the Public Hearing open concerning the request by Millers Creek Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. for fire tax rate increases in fiscal year 2020-2021 Wilkes County Budget at 5:47 P.M. on Tuesday, June 2, 2020 with the following members present: Chairman Eddie Settle, Vice Chairman David Gambill, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner Gary D. Blevins, and Commissioner Brain S. Minton.

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

Public Notice for the Public Hearing was published in the Wilkes-Journal Patriot on May 20, 2020 and May 27, 2020, posted on the County bulletin board outside the meeting location and on the County website. The Public Notice is attached and made a part of these minutes.

Chairman Settle stated Mr. Yates will read their justification letter and then the letters received in opposition at this time:

*Millers Creek Fire Department
Fire Tax Increase Request*

*To: Wilkes County Manager and Wilkes County Board of Commissioners
From: Millers Creek Fire Department Board of Directors and Fire Chief*

Date: May 19th, 2020

The Board of Directors of the Millers Creek Fire Department met on Thursday, February 12th to discuss the 2020-2021 budget and the future plans for the fire department. Two budgets were presented by Fire Chief, Robbie Bolin. A budget was presented with the department remaining at our current .7 cent fire tax rate and a budget was presented at a .10 cent tax rate.

After much discussion on the matter it was determined that the Millers Creek Fire Department needed to raise its fire tax rate to .10 cents to meet current department growth and costs for the future needs of the department. This was voted on and approved by the board of directors with a vote of 5 to 1. This will raise our overall yearly tax revenue approximately \$155,000 per year. Reasons cited for this include and are not limited to future development of the fire department in the following areas:

1 to 4-year plan for Building & Grounds maintenance, repair and upgrade: (parking lot, lighting, bay doors and other improvements and/or renovations for the Millers Creek Station and Parsonsville Station.

5-year plan to maintain and provide additional staffing to cover calls and other needs

5 and 10-year plan for the purchase of new firetrucks

2-4year plan for replacement and purchase of out of date and obsolete PPE and equipment for the firefighters

4 to 6-year plan for the possibility of adding fulltime personnel

Our department has been fortunate enough to operate with funding from FEMA through a SAFER grant for recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters that will expire in August of 2020. Through this funding we were able to offer the following to our volunteers.

Call pay stipend: Members are paid per call for the calls they respond to. This is a certification-based pay that begins at a rate of \$8.00 per call. As members obtain FF, Rescue, EMT, Driver Operator, Wildland FF, NC Fire Officer.... The member receives a raise in their respective call pay. FF and EMT are an extra \$2.00 each with all others being \$1.00. A member could make a maximum of \$17.00 per call for all certifications that MCFD offers an incentive for. The average cost for this stipend over the last 4 years has been around \$28,000 per year.

Funding has allowed the department to pay the cost of 2 of our PT duty personnel. Saving over \$10,000 per year.

Funding has allowed the department to reimburse volunteers with a stipend of \$10.00 per hour for all class time that is spent obtaining basic certifications. Travel pay for lodging and meals are also included when a member travels outside of our area for training certification classes at weekend schools or fire academy. Over the last 4 years we have recruited over 25 new members and have been able to keep around 60 percent of those recruited. Of those recruited we have an almost 100 percent rate of those people obtaining firefighter and EMT certifications. These funds also can and have been used by members who were already volunteering to attend classes and obtain certifications. At this time with a roster of 44 senior members and 4 Junior Firefighters we have 32 certified Firefighters, 29 Medically trained members to include 2 NC Medical Responders/ 20 EMT's and 7 paramedics along with 14 members certified at NC Rescue Technician, 9 of those certified as Rope Techs and 11 Water Rescue Personnel. The average cost to send members to training and offer this stipend has been around \$25, 000 per year. New budget will reflect a small decrease in this amount due to the number of members we now have certified but will need to remain close to the amounts spent to help retain and recruit members. With the FEMA funding we have been able to supply new volunteers with NFPA physicals and after passing those physicals supply the new member with PPE.

There are a few other items included in the grant such as tuition assistance for college and marketing funds that we will not continue. The 4 items listed are things that are proposed in our new budget with the tax increase for the department to take up in budget to assist in retaining and recruiting members. Without the tax increase all 4 of the items listed will go away and not be funded with a .7cent budget and with a .7cent budget our capital line item would only hold around \$10,000. This would need to be kept in limbo in case of expenditures such as emergency truck maintenance or other items coming up that would not be covered in our budget and no new equipment would be able to be purchased. With a .7cent budget the only place the department would have funds to cut from to use would be Capital and part time budget. A part time budget cut would be the last resort as this would cause shortfalls in our staffing model that we currently have. That model at this time has a minimum of 2 personnel that are certified Firefighter/EMT and often time Rescue certified as well on duty Monday thru Saturday from 9am to 5pm. We also staff 1 Firefighter/EMT on Sundays from 9am to 5pm. By having cuts to our part time program, we would likely be limited to 1 person per day with some days having no one on duty. Our Part time program was started in 2009 with 1 person on duty 2 or 3 days per week and we have progressed to the point we are at now. Although we still have a strong volunteer roster, during the work week during daytime hours is when we and most all volunteer fire departments lack in manpower. We are fortunate to have many members who work a rotational schedule with either an EMS Agency or a career fire department, this allows them to work in our part time program on off days. If cuts were to be made to our part time budget, we foresee losing those members during the peak times to other fire departments or EMS agencies in our area and other counties that offer part time duty work.

As mentioned in our 5-year plan, Millers Creek Fire Department will have a need for a firetruck replacement cycle in less than 5 years now. An estimated cost of a new truck, depending on type and brand that we purchase will run anywhere from \$555,000 to \$750,000 which will have a yearly truck payment at a minimum of \$50,000 per year. The last year a truck was purchased new by Millers Creek under budget was in 2010 at a price of \$420,000. Currently we still have in service a 1985, 1991 and 1995 model firetrucks that will need to be replaced over the next 10 years.

As mentioned above we have a great need to start a replacement cycle for our PPE that members wear. The cost to outfit 1 firefighter with a Coat, Helmet, Pants, Gloves, Hood and Boots just for structural firefighting is a minimum of \$3800.00. Other PPE such as wildland firefighting gear and rescue gear add another \$1500 per person. We have turnout that will age out by NFPA standards this year. NFPA recommends all firefighting PPE if used during structural firefighting be replaced and removed from service every 7 to 10 years. We do maintain, clean and have repaired, the gear that needs repairs but with our call volume and training, our members have gear that is worn-out at the 7 to 10-year mark. Although we have members that do not conduct interior firefighting and that gear can be used longer, the majority of our interior firefighters are wearing gear that will expire in 2020 or 2021.

Our department has and always will work to obtain grants to assist in anything related to the fire service such as equipment and truck purchases and if possible, a hiring grant. AFG and SAFER grants through FEMA and Department of Homeland Security have assisted us through the last

13 years but is very competitive as we are pitted against other like fire departments across the United States with a cap on the amount of funding that can be given out each year. We also used to obtain funding from the NC Volunteer Fire grant but this grant has changed in the last few years and due to our income, staffing and other items that are considered in the process, we have not received funding from this grant on 7 years.

By not having this tax increase approved, the Millers Creek Fire Department will be forced to operate at a decreased capacity from what our citizens are used to and come to expect. With the potential for having less members on duty during peak times, out of date PPE and equipment and less trained personnel, the safety of our firefighters and citizens of our community could be at risk.

The Board of Directors, officers and Members of the Millers Creek Fire Department thank you for your continued support of the fire service in Wilkes County.

Mr. Yates stated Millers Creek also submitted a 5-7 year plan that has been given out to the Board and included in the packets.

MCFD 5-7 year plan

- 1. 2020 through 2022 we need to spend a minimum of \$20,000 per year to upgrade and replace out of date turnout gear for the firefighters.*
- 2. Through the next 4 years old outdated equipment such as hose, nozzles, hand tools and other equipment need to be phased out and new equipment purchased. We are still operating with some hose and nozzles that were purchased in the 1990's as well as hand tools and other equipment.*
- 3. Over the next 4 years we will have Rescue Equipment that will need to be replaced due to aging and obsolescence such as Rescue Rope, Extrication Equipment and other items.*
- 4. By 2025 our current Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (Airpacks) will be 15 years old and out of NFPA compliance. This alone will be a \$300,000 plus purchase when made.*
- 5. 2020 fix the rear area of the parking lot at a cost of \$52,000*
- 6. 2021 work on interior and exterior lighting switch to LED lights*
- 7. 2021-2022 Replace garage doors at a cost of \$54,000*
- 8. 2021-2023 finish parking lot repairs (Paving vs. Concrete)*
- 9. 2023 we need to be in a position to form a truck committee to be ready to order and purchase a truck in 2024.*
 - a. Decision needs to be made on what type of truck*
 - b. What it will replace*
 - c. Thoughts are to purchase a new ladder truck, potentially sell the 1995 Saulsbury and 1991 Ladder Truck*
 - d. Upgrade and refurbish the 2009 Pumper at station 2 now to run at station 1 or purchase a used pumper to take the place of the 1995 and 1985 pumper at station 1.*

10. 2021 purchase a QRV type vehicle for med calls to take the strain off 2414. MCFD personnel respond to over 450 medical calls per year and 90% of those calls are responded to in a fire department vehicle.
 - a. Purchase an SUV type vehicle for this purpose
 - b. Would also like to look at purchasing a pick up for use general in the department as well for carrying equipment back from fire scenes to be washed, travel to and from the Parsonsville Fire Station during work hours for truck checkoffs, used as an additional Medical QRV when needed as MCFD has received multiple med calls at one time.
11. All funds that are not used for building and grounds, capital purchases and other needed budget line items will be placed into staffing over the next 5 years. The goal is to continue to add hours to our part time duty program to cover additional needed time slots.
12. Eventual goal if call volume and work load continues will be to hire fulltime staffing. This project will be worked on over the next 5 years and plan in place possibly for the 2024-2026-time frame.

Mr. Yates read comments received by email and/or letters from citizens in opposition of the Millers Creek Fire Tax District increase request:

May 21, 2020

*Mr. John Yates
Wilkes County Manager
110 North St., Wilkesboro, NC 28697*

Dear Mr. Yates,

I read with concern the posting by the County Commissioners in Wednesday May 20th edition of the local paper about the proposed almost 50% increase in our fire tax rate in Millers Creek.

What a horrible time to even consider raising our fire tax with this pandemic across our county. Have you considered the citizens that are now out of work, seniors on a fixed income, families with many kids barely making money to feed them? Apparently no one at the county level has. Recently Wilkesboro announced an increase in water rates. For many Millers Creek residents this is a double punch in the gut from government.

And why call it a "Public Meeting" when the public cannot attend? Could it be the Millers Creek Fire Dept. board wanted this rushed thru so no one could attend and voice opposition? Will our elected commissioners not postpone this hearing to later this year when residents could appear? If you poll Millers Creek residents I can assure you will find at least 9 out of 10 will tell you they have observed waste at Millers Creek Fire Department such as driving the large trucks to get lunch sometimes going out on US 421 toward Chic-Filet, responding to a first responder call

with one of the large fire trucks, fire department members washing their cars at the station, unnecessary lounging at the station and many other issues with waste.

Other questions: When was a full audit completed at the fire department?

Does the rescue squad, ambulance and sheriff's departments pay the fire department for use of the building? If no then why not.

I fully support the fire department but am certain this is not the time to seek almost 50% increase in the rate. Would you consider raising county tax from .67 to .97 per hundred. I think not.

The fire department board needs to tighten their belt and be very conservative at this time. I am sure they can get by as most all citizens are forced to be very conservative at this terrible time.

*Respectfully,
Hayden Church
240 Friendly Grove Ch. Rd., Millers Creek, NC 28651
336-466-0255*

Dear Wilkes County Commissioners:

I would like to voice my opposition to the tax rate increase requested by the Millers Creek Fire Department. Due to the financial burdens placed on many Wilkes

County citizens over the past few months, any tax increase would be unwise and foolish at this time. MCFD is a great asset to our community, yet they receive more

tax dollars than any other voluntary fire department in the county. Like everyone else, they need to tighten their belt and live within their means.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to voice my opinion.

Sincerely

*Charles Church
531 Purlear Road
Purlear, NC 28665
336-973-7699*

Dear Elected Officials,

I strongly oppose the rate increase request made by the Millers Creek Fire Department. Although to some this increase may seem small, many families are struggling right now to even live. Many people were forced into unemployment and are experiencing financial burdens as

never before in these unprecedented times. Simply put, it is too much to ask of the citizens to help fund the nonessential needs of their local volunteer fire department.

Millers Creek FD currently receives more funding than other volunteer departments in the county. Although I appreciate the service they provide, I'm certain that all other departments in the county are equally dedicated and provide services at the same level, with less funding.

Thank you in advance for the consideration of this opposition.

*Monica C. Bolick
511 Purlear Road
Purlear NC 28665
(336)973-0575*

Mr. Yates stated on May 29, 2020 the following 24 letters were hand delivered to the Manager's Office to be read at the public hearing. He will read one of the letters since they are all the same form letter and will read each name that submitted one.

May 22, 2020

*Mr. John Yates
Wilkes County Manager
110 North St., Wilkesboro, NC 28697*

Dear Mr. Yates,

It was very troubling for me to see a request by Millers Creek Fire Dept. Board of Directors to ask for a rate increase of fire tax by 40%. Did anyone let them know there is a pandemic across our country. Our largest employer Tyson has been shut twice. Many many small businesses are on life support. Wilkesboro announced raising water rates thru West Wilkes Water Assoc. just a few of the setbacks we are facing.

MCFD Board had poor insight and no input from the citizens before the enormous building they now have. Had they been conserving for the last several years they would not need this raise. We all see the waste there at the fire department. Needlessly cruising in the large fire trucks, sending large fire trucks on first responder calls, members using the department for personal use when the citizens are forbidden to use space in the department for social functions.

Will our elected commissioners delay this hearing until citizens can attend?

If not I am certain it's time get someone elected who fairly represents the citizens as they were elected to do. Many citizens especially seniors have no computer to respond or cannot respond by mail. MCFD BOD must think we will not realize why the hearing is being held (1. While citizens cannot attend this meeting and voice opposition and (2. Held on a RUSH basis to get

passed thru. But we know the county commissioners are the board to be held accountable for this vote.

Please consider delaying this hearing until later this year when the Millers Creek citizens can attend.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Bumgarner – 336-838-8681, 487 Green Acres Myers Street, 05/23/2020
Pamela J. Oakley – 336-452-2007, 379 Green Acres Myers Street, 05/23/2020
Kenneth Eastridge – 336-984-0555, P.O. Box 654, Millers Creek NC 28651, 05/22/2020
Tommy Gray – 336-667-3856, 2272 PADS Rd., Millers Creek, NC, 05/23/2020
Rex M. Church – 336-262-6576, 437 G.A. Myers St., Millers Creek, NC 28651, 05/22/20
Christine Nichols – 336-667-2992, Green Acres Myers St., 05/23/2020
Hohn Church – 336-984-9319, Wilkesboro, NC, 05/22/2020
Mr. Minton – 336-667-3920, 420 Roten Lane, Millers Creek, NC, 05/23/2020
James Todd Woodie – 336-262-4276, 241 W. Highland St., Millers Creek, NC 28651, 05/22/20
Matthew Andrews – 336-957-1180, 1008 Kite Rd., Millers Creek 28651, 05/22/2020
Jeff Greene – 336-902-9242, 1162 Oak Grove Church Rd., Millers Creek, NC, 05/22/2020
Shelia Howell – 336-469-9166, 187 W. Highland St., Millers Creek, NC 28651, 05/22/2020
Justin Dancy – 828-964-0784, 174 West Highland St., Millers Creek, NC 28651, 05/23/2020
Jeff Pugh – 336-838-3089, 151 W. Highland St., Millers Creek, NC 28651, 05/23/2020
James G. Barker – 336-957-0157, 05/23/2020
Tina M. Parlier – 336-452-7857, 287 West Highland Street, NC 28651, 05/23/2020
Mike Kerhoulas – 704-787-3828, 05/26/2020
Lynn D. Goodman – 336-469-6535, 05/26/2020
Geneva Eller – 05/28/2020
James H. Richardson – 336-667-3401, 1714 Park Place, 05/27/2020
Caroline R. Kerhoulas- 704-787-0069, 05/26/2020
Scott Bishop – 336-262-0026, 5017 Boone Trail, Millers Creek, NC, 28651, 05/29/2020
Jimmy Church – 336-466-4671, 282 Friendly Grove Church Rd., 05/21/2020
Heather Lawson – 336-566-1985, 757 Millard Lane, Millers Creek, NC 25651

Chairman Settle stated Chief Robbie Bolin and Board President Mike Cardwell are on WebEx if the Board has questions for them. He added since they are in this situation and cannot have the public in attendance this is only open for questions from the Board for them to answer, but they cannot have any free comments as it would not be fair to those that could not attend in opposition. Chairman Settle asked if they voted on this February 12, 2020 with a 5-1 vote. Chief Bolin replied yes. Chairman Settle stated then COVID-19 started the end of March, if they had that vote today, would it still be 5-1. Mr. Cardwell replied after COVID came he was concerned, he called another Board meeting and the increase was discussed, it was in April and it passed again with a vote of 4-2. He added this is why it was submitted with the increase request. Chairman Settle asked if they will receive any CARES Act money for PPE. Mr. Yates replied this is not all worked out, they think they can help with PPE for some fire departments with some of those funds. Chairman Settle asked if they have looked into getting any of the CARES Act

money. Mr. Cardwell replied they have not. The Chief handles all this. The bottom line is they had the lowest rate in the county and about 2007 they went from 5¢ to 7¢, since that time they have lived on grants. They will continue to seek grant funds, but they are going away this year and the fire department is still one of the lowest rates in the county at 7¢. He added they felt like they could increase their budget this way so they don't have to decrease services because they won't get the grant this year.

Chairman Settle asked if they could make it a year to get through the COVID-19 crunch with their current tax rate. Mr. Cardwell said he went to the Board, called another meeting and they voted again to ask for the increase. He said he did this twice and they voted for the increase each time. He added this is a bad time for everyone and his taxes are going up to. Chairman Settle agreed and added the county has cut their budget 14% and this was not easy to do, they hope it will get better, but it's tough.

Vice Chairman Gambill stated they have community members and fire members on the Board and officers. He asked if they have an open public meeting when they are discussing their budget. Vice Chairman Gambill added that is the reason this Board started having public hearings on these requests, is for the public to be informed. Mr. Cardwell said he has been on the Board since 2010 and they have never had to do that before, but they have not asked for a tax increase since he has been in this role either.

Commissioner Blevins asked Tony Triplett what is the role of the Board of Commissioner in this case, they have a contract with them and they have a duly elected Board in their Fire District. He asked if the Board of Commissioner's has ever rejected a request from a fire department for an increase during his 30 years as county attorney. Mr. Triplett said in his 30 years no they have not. He added what typically happens is the fire departments submit budgets each year and their fire tax rate have to be approved as part the budget the Commissioners adopt. Ultimately they are adopting the fire tax rate and have the right to accept or reject the requested rate the fire department presents. Mr. Triplett said he has never seen the Board of Commissioners reject a fire tax rate increase request from a fire department. Chairman Settle asked during his time as county attorney has he seen a time as they are living in now. Mr. Triplett replied no he has not, these are unprecedented times and he has never seen anything like it in his lifetime.

Commissioner Elmore stated they have 27 people that sent letters in opposition, they have a fire department with a lot of volunteers, the citizens need the protection and he is not sure of the solution. It needs to be between the community and the fire department. He added he is not comfortable voting against the fire department request, they have a board and they need funding to protect the citizens, it is up to them to make that decision. Commissioner Elmore said he would have to support what the Board in Millers Creek decides. He asked if they have another meeting, would they have a different vote and would they consider doing this. Mr. Cardwell said this is unprecedented times and they don't want to be the bad guys here. They have fire departments already with this rate, they are blessed with a large tax base. He added he does not care to go back to the Board again and he is trying to mediate and can present it again and see what happens. Commissioner Elmore said maybe the Board was not aware of all the letters and emails and this will be something to present and for them to consider at another meeting.

Commissioner Minton stated he has spoken to folks in the community and there is more opposition than those that sent letters.

Chairman Settle stated if it was not for these unprecedented times this would not be questioned, there would still be a public hearing. Vice Chairman Gambill added they are not trying to set their budget, it is the timing and his main concern and the reason for this hearing is so the public knows. He added that is why this is held and put in the newspaper, the point is to have the voice of the community in the decision. Vice Chairman Gambill said it costs a lot, it is specialized and they take on a lot more duties and first responder calls and help on rescues. They understand, but they also wanted the public to be aware and have a voice in any increase requests.

Chairman Settle stated they plan to pass their budget at the next meeting, which is in two weeks. Mr. Triplett stated that is a good point and he would like to add for the members of the Fire Department and Community there is no action this Board can take tonight, it will be at the next meeting. He added maybe that will give the Fire Department time to have another Board meeting and talk about it again. Mr. Triplett said he needs to point out this Public Hearing they are holding tonight is not required by law, this Board has elected to hold it and afford the opportunity to citizens to present their point of view on a proposed tax increase request. He added the Public Hearing has served its purpose and they have heard from the fire department and citizens. They also have 24 hours to submit comments by law in writing and then action will be taken at the next Board meeting to adopt the budget.

Mr. Cardwell asked what is the time line to get back to them so their budget is not affected. Chairman Settle replied the county budget will be passed in 2 weeks. Mr. Cardwell said their regular monthly meeting is next Thursday, and hopefully they can get it taken care of. Chairman Settle added they know it is tough, this is his 12th budget and he has not seen opposition to a fire department tax increase request until now and they have received numerous. He stated folks from their community are contacting them, if they have time to have a public meeting in Millers Creek with the citizens, that might help. Mr. Cardwell said they will have a monthly Board meeting.

Chief Bolin said there were some questions that Mr. Yates read about EMS using their building, and he wanted to state they do pay rent and help pay the power bill for usage of the building. He added the other question was can they operate without the tax increase, they can't tell them they can't. He presented a 7¢ budget to the Board, however it lacks everything that was read in their statement, not only would their volunteers be losing incentives they have been offering from the grant, it is likely the community may suffer as well. Chief Bolin said they are likely to lose members to other agencies that are hiring part-time duty work, there are others paying more than they pay. He added they understand it is a very bad time and hopefully they can get it worked out.

The Board thanked Mike Cardwell and Robbie Bolin for all they do and all the Fireman. They also thanked them for housing the EMS at their station which is a great service to the Millers Creek Community and are very appreciative.

Chairman Settle declared the Public Hearing closed at 6:23 P.M. on the proposed fire tax rate increase for Millers Creek Volunteer Fire Department, Inc.

PUBLIC HEARING – 2020-2021 PROPOSED WILKES COUNTY BUDGET – Chairman Eddie Settle declared the Public Hearing open concerning the 2020-2021 proposed Wilkes County Budget at 6:23 P.M. on Tuesday, June 2, 2020 with the following members present: Chairman Eddie Settle, Vice Chairman David Gambill, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner Gary D. Blevins, and Commissioner Brain S. Minton.

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

Public Notice for the Public Hearing was published in the Wilkes-Journal Patriot on May 20, 2020 and May 27, 2020, posted on the County bulletin board outside the meeting location and on the County website. The Public Notice is attached and made a part of these minutes.

Chairman Settle recognized County Manager John Yates who read the comments received at this time:

*To: County of Wilkes
From: Wilkes Heritage Museum Executive Committee
Subject: Replacement of HVAC Units
Date: May 20, 2020*

The Wilkes Heritage Museum is proud to have its home in the 1902 Old Wilkes County Courthouse. Since opening this historic structure as a museum in November 2005, thousand of visitors to our beautiful area have toured and learned about our rich history. After undertaking a 2.4 million dollar capital campaign to restore this magnificent edifice into a museum, our non-profit organization has weathered a recession and now a pandemic. The County of Wilkes has partnered with the Wilkes Heritage Museum with yearly appropriations, support for the McNeil Genealogy Collection, upkeep for the roof, maintenance of the elevator that the museum installed during the renovations. This partnership has been key to the success of the museum allowed our small non-profit to survive during lean times. The Wilkes Heritage Museum has been closed to the public for two months due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, staff and volunteers have continued to care for our historic properties so that we can reopen to the public in a safe environment. The staff and board of directors have been frugal during this time to ensure that daily operating needs are met.

Before the pandemic caused our doors to temporarily close, two of our HVAC units quit working. This was reported to Phillip Stone who worked with our Director, Jennifer Furr. On acquiring quotes to replace not only these two units, but six more that will eventually have to be replaced. After working with Phillip, Jennifer asked for the funding to replace these two units along with the annual appropriations request from the Wilkes Heritage Museum. In the meantime, Jennifer worked to contact local foundations and other funding sources to help with

this project. Only one foundational request come to fruition with a portion of the requested funds. The total collected through the museum was \$5,000.

When summer comes, the heat and humidity will cause a substantial amount of damage to the artifacts that the museum has in its care. It is imperative that these two units be replaced before this damage can take place. There are a lot of uncertainties right now under current conditions, but, we will not be able to replace the artifacts we have in our care should they be damaged due to negligence. On behalf of the full board of trustees, staff and volunteers at the Wilkes Heritage Museum, the museum's Executive Committee would like to urge the County of Wilkes to provide the full funding requested for fiscal year 2020-2021.

Sincerely,

George A. Childers, Chairman; Korann Graves, Vice-Chair; Rose S. Andrews, Secretary; Shannon W. Snuggs, Treasurer; Rosemany Markle, Immediate Past Chair; Linda Cheek, Member-at-Large; and Arnold Lakey, Member-at-Large

Chairman Settle declared the Public Hearing closed at 6:26 P. M. on the proposed 2020-2021 Wilkes County Budget.

The below email was received at 3:18 PM on June 3, 2020 and pursuant to authorization under Session Law 2020-3 adopted by the North Carolina General Assembly on May 4, 2020, public comments on the proposed 2020-2021 Budget may be submitted at any time between the initial publication of this Notice and twenty-four (24) hours following the conclusion of the public hearing. All public comments must be in writing and must be submitted by one of three methods: by U. S. mail, by email, or by hand-delivery to the Wilkes County Office Building.

Hello and good afternoon to all,

My name is Sarah Billings. I reside at 230 Gentry St, North Wilkesboro, NC 28659. My cell phone number is 828-372-2170. We purchased this property in 2018 although I have lived in Wilkes County since I was born. I am emailing because I am concerned that the budget cuts directed to the Wilkes County Schools is too high for the upcoming school year to be considered reasonable. My child has lost interaction with his teacher this year as have all the other children due to the Pandemic. The county as a whole will need extra educational support for the next year rather than less in order to maintain acceptable educational levels. Knowledge is power and growth. I do not believe that cutting the educational system will promote the health of the county in its future. Can the additional cuts not be directed from a source that is not as essential?

Thank you for your attention,

Sarah Billings

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, June 2, 2020 at 6:33 P.M. at the Wilkes County Agricultural Center located 416 Executive Drive, Wilkesboro, NC 28697 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 called the meeting to order.

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 Brian S. Minton and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on May 19, 2020.

BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS – Motion was made by Commissioner Gary D. Blevins to approve Budget Amendment No. 37 (General – Soli & Water and Fire Districts – Soil & Water received a grant in the amount of \$28,500 from the National Water Quality Initiative to be used to improve water quality of Stream. These seven Fire Departments collections were higher than projected in the current budget, in the total amount of 93,000). The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATE – Chairman Settle welcomed and recognized John Blevins, DSS Director. Mr. Blevins said first he would like to provide a few updates. The auditors wanted a letter from the State on the Medicaid Audit they just completed at DSS. He said it took a long time to get this information, but finally Betty Beasley sent an email and it said “we are pleased to say your county has been a role model for the other 29 counties in cycle one.” Mr. Blevins said there were three areas they looked at from the 200 cases they reviewed over the 10 months. The first was accuracy rate, the state requirement was 96%, Wilkes DSS had 98%; next was a negative accuracy requirement of 96%, Wilkes DSS had 100%; last was internal control accuracy rate was 90%, Wilkes DSS has 95.5%. He added the workers did good work and he is very proud of them.

Mr. Blevins next update was on the extra funding that is coming in due to the coronavirus. He said the extra funding for LIEAP of \$12,085.36 come in and each person received a small amount of assistance paid directly to their providers. He added Work First recipients with children that applied before April received a one-time payment on May 22nd. Mr. Blevins said \$54,060 total was received for the 130 individuals on Work First that had children and applied. He added the interview requirements for food and nutrition are still suspended, no in person interviews are taking place through June 30th which is a benefit to all. Mr. Blevins said last month he mentioned that these folks were receiving the maximin benefit. He stated in March

3,546 cases and 6,842 participants in Wilkes received an additional \$636,779. In April 3,595 cases and 6,933 participants in Wilkes received an additional \$644,218.

Mr. Blevins said last month they talked about the P-EBT for the children that received free and reduced lunch. There are 3 phases and the money is coming out now for phase 1 and phase 2 began June 1st and cover 65 school days, phase 3 begins at the end of June. Mr. Blevins said on May 11th there was 5,479 cases, 7,524 participants and \$1,458,151 was paid out through the P-EBT. He will keep the Board updated as this program continues.

Mr. Blevins said the next update is a benefit the county received under COVID-19 the IV-E reimbursement rate from the federal government for Foster Care and Adoption assistance. It increased from 67.03% to 73.23%. The effective date is January 2020 and they received a payment in May for January through April for adoption assistance of \$18,444 that came back to the county in reimbursements. He added in the back of the packets is a breakdown of rates. Mr. Blevins added this will be helpful to the budget. Commissioner Elmore asked if this is all federal money or is some from the state. Mr. Blevins replied with this higher reimbursement right now DSS IV-E Foster Child federal reimbursement is 73.23%, state is 13.385% and county is 13.385%. The county and state have gone down at this time since the federal rate increase for this period. He added this is one area the state provides help.

Mr. Blevins went over the monthly caseload report for April. Next he went through the Adoption Services financial report, Child Development and Subsidized Child Care financial reports for April. Mr. Blevins went through the CPS Foster Care monthly report for April. He added the last item is a letter they received recently that goes back to the MOU Agreements signed last year. The State is not going to issue any formal correction actions if any agencies do not meet the performances set out in the MOU for 2019-2020. He added they were meeting all the measures in the MOU and their workers do a very good job. Mr. Blevins said they are not going to issue a new MOU for 2020-2021 instead they are going to send one starting January 2021 through June 30, 2022. He added this would be a long MOU, but there is no formal agreement binding the county to any performance measures in this physical year and he wanted to let the Board know where this stood.

Vice Chairman Gambill asked how court proceedings are going during COVID-19, are things behind and backed up with TRP, Child support, etc. Have they used online meetings of any kind to keep things going. Mr. Blevins replied at the Curtis Bridge office where the attorneys are they have been able to meet in the conference room and do a lot of things remotely through WebEx and the internet. He added they have been able to work around it for the most part.

The Board thanked Mr. Blevins for the updates and information.

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SCHEDULED MEETING – CANCEL JULY 21, 2020 – Chairman Settle asked if the Board would like to cancel the second meeting in July as they normally do.

Vice Chairman David Gambill made a motion to cancel the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners second meeting in July scheduled for July 21, 2020. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

OLD BUSINESS – Chairman Settle asked the Board to please consider names to nominate to appoint as a new WTA Board. He added since the Commissioners took control of WTA they are doing better and those folks are doing a great job over there.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Settle stated the county has received CARES Act money for PPE and other things, but there are senior citizens in our community especially during COVID-19 that are not eating or being feed property. There are some on the waiting list for Meals on Wheels and they hope to have some money to put toward this and help these senior citizens that are not getting the food they need. Chairman Settle added the school is feeding the young folks. Commissioner Elmore said a lot are also getting the P-EBT cards. Chairman Settle added the senior citizens don't get either and he hopes they can help some of them with the CARES Act money. Mr. Yates stated they are getting some funds and hopes to have Phil Trew here at the next meeting to help go through it, there is a lot or red tape and requirements for the money with claw backs. Chairman Settle added it seems that there are lots of programs for the kids, but not for the seniors that are afraid to leave their homes. Mr. Yates stated BROCC has applied for \$306,368 of CARES funds as well, he does not know what they have or will get, but have applied. Chairman Settle said maybe they can get them to come to the next meeting and give an update. Commissioner Elmore asked if they are operating the meal sites, due to the 10 or less. Commissioner Minton stated the meal sites are delivering meals.

Vice Chairman Gambill stated he would like to make the Board aware the next Board of Commissioners' meeting he will be out of town and will join via WebEx.

Vice Chairman Gambill said he would like to see if there is anyway to help The Heritage Museum with the AC, can they send someone to look at it or do anything. Mr. Yates said they have had folks to check it out and from his understanding two of them have to be replaced. Chairman Settle stated their request was to replace all of them. Vice Chairman Gambill asked can they come up with this in the budget. Mr. Yates stated they were cut 14% just like everyone else. Vice Chairman Gambill said he is OK with helping to fix the AC, they have to have that and do have important documents to protect. Chairman Settle agreed they need to look at this, he is not sure how they operate, but they did raise a little funds on their own.

Commissioner Elmore said he would like to see them come up with a solution or fine for unsecured loads going to the dump. He passes them all the time and they lose bags and trash. They need to catch them coming in and determine it is an unsecured load and fine them. Commissioner Elmore said they fine folks for dogs and have a court for those, can't they do the same for unsecured loads with photos or whatever it takes to fine them. He added if folks know they are going to be fined \$100 when they did this, they will secure their load. Commissioner Elmore sated this is not being done and it needs to be enforced. They need to fix this.

Commissioner Elmore said he would like the Board to send a letter to Senator Ballard, Representative Stevens and Representative Elmore to see why Hwy 268 construction is not getting done. He drives this road daily and it is beating his vehicle to death and he has had flat tires. He added this is not against the local people they have great local DOT people, but something is just not right about the project. Commissioner Elmore said it is taking so long, what is the normal time frame for competing a 1 mile section of highway. It is ridiculous what the folks that live there have to put up with. Chairman Settle said he is in favor of this and they can draft a letter this week. Commissioner Elmore said this has been going on for 5 years or more. Commissioner Blevins said they have been making reports to North Wilkesboro's Board that he read in the paper. He added it has been excuse after excuse and one of the most horrible highway projects they have every witnessed. It is a busy road that needs to be safer all the way to the county line, and he has brought this up many times in other meetings he attends. Commissioner Blevins said he agrees, it is horrible and an eyesore. Vice Chairman Gambill added Airport Road to Elkin is the most dangerous part. Chairman Settle stated they will try to get a report for the next meeting.

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 7:08 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Eddie Settle, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: June 16, 2020