

**MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
July 11, 2017**

PUBLIC CONCERNS – None

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, July 11, 2017 at 10:00 A.M. with the following members present: Chairman Greg Minton, Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner David Gambill, and Commissioner Eddie Settle.

Also present were Vannoy, Colvard, Triplett & Vannoy, County Attorney Law Firm represented by Daniel S. Johnson; John Yates, County Manager; and Jerry Shepherd Acting Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Greg Minton called the meeting to order.

INVOCATION – Commissioner David Gambill led the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chairman Greg Minton recognized Grayson Yates from Boy Scout Troop 399, Millers Creek and said he will be leading the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Grayson Yates led the Pledge of Allegiance at this time.

APPONTMENT OF ACTING CLERK – Chairman Minton stated the Board needs to appoint an acting Clerk.

Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins made a motion to appoint Jerry Shepherd as acting Clerk as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously approved.

Chairman Minton thanked Daniel Johnson from the Vannoy, Colvard, Triplett & Vannoy Law Firm for his attendance at today's meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion was made by Commissioner Keith Elmore, seconded by Commissioner Eddie Settle and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board meeting held on June 20, 2017.

WILKES COUNTY LIBRARY BOARD – REAPPOINTMENTS – Chairman Greg Minton recognized and welcomed Julia Turpin, County Librarian. Ms. Turpin said the trustees of the Wilkes County Library Advisory Board are recommending Ms. Sunie (Becky) Ball and Ms. Gwen Minton be reappointed to serve a second term beginning August 1, 2017. She said both have served faithfully on the Wilkes Library Board. Mrs. Turpin added they have both completed a 4-year term and are willing and able to complete a second 4-year term and she is requesting approval.

Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins made a motion to approve the reappointment of Ms. Sunie (Becky) Ball and Ms. Gwen Minton to serve on the Wilkes County Library Board for 4-year terms, as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner David Gambill and unanimously approved.

BLUE RIDGE OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (BROC) – APPROVAL – HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE BLOCK GRANT BUDGET FOR FY 2017-2018 – Chairman Greg Minton recognized Jennifer Cooper, Program Director, Senior Nutrition Services. Ms. Cooper stated a packet was sent to the Board to approve the budget because BROC is the lead agency for aging services in Wilkes County and she is here to request approval. She added this is for the BROC Senior Nutrition Services, Wilkes Senior Resources, and the Ruby Pardue Blackburn Adult Day Health Care Center.

Ms. Cooper said the total proposed budget is \$526,348 the packet includes each individual agency's proposed budget and the required county match. Vice Chairman Blevins asked how this compared to last year. Ms. Cooper replied it is less, they lost a small amount of funding that they expected would not be funded again. Ms. Cooper stated the Boards' approval is needed to renew the contract with the High Country Council of Governments for the Home and Community Care Block Grant Funds for older adults for fiscal year 2017-2018.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to approve the Blue Ridge Opportunity Commission Home and Community Care Block Grant Budget for FY 2017-2018 as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner David Gambill and unanimously approved.

TAX ADMINISTRATOR REAPPOINTMENT – County Manager John Yates stated it is Statute that the Board of Commissioners have the right to appoint the Tax Assessor to either a two or four year term or this needs to be referred to as "term" as it is not actually a contract. He added Mr. Hamilton has been the Tax Administrator for the last eighteen years. Mr. Yates stated Mr. Hamilton is finishing a four year term and would like to be reappointed for another four year term.

Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins made a motion to reappoint Alex Hamilton as the Tax Administrator for a four year term effective July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2021. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously approved.

Mr. Alex Hamilton thanked the Board.

TAX DEPARTMENT:

1. TAX RELEASES – LISTING – Alex Hamilton, Tax Administrator asked the Board to approve tax releases for listings in the amount of \$1,817.44. Vice Chairman Blevins asked how something becomes double listed. Mr. Hamilton replied sometimes it was listed as Real Estate and Personal Property and should only be listed as one or the other. He added in some cases two people list the same item without realizing that only one of them needs to list it.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to approve the tax releases for listing as presented. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins and unanimously approved.

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

2. TAX RELEASES – COLLECTIONS – Alex Hamilton, Tax Administrator asked the Board to approve tax releases for collections in the amount of \$263.11. Mr. Hamilton said this is due to a person passing away and the personal property bills are now uncollectable.

Commissioner David Gambill made a motion to approve the tax releases for collections as presented. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Gary D. Blevins and unanimously approved.

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

The Board thanked Mr. Hamilton and congratulated him on his reappointment.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:

1. ENERGY PROGRAMS OUTREACH PLAN – APPROVAL FOR FY 2017-2018 – Chairman Greg Minton recognized and welcomed Department of Social Services Director John Blevins. Mr. Blevins said this is a standard plan and there have not been any changes since last year. The plan states who they will work with and how they get the information out to the public for people to apply for this assistance. He added this is federal money and the county only covers the administration of the program. Mr. Blevins said they have received \$296,324 each for both programs and have already gave out about \$39,000 in allocations for cooling expense assistance this month. He stated all LIHEAP Outreach Plans must be approved by the local Board and he is requesting approval of the DSS plan for FY 17-18. Mr. Blevins said this is a lot of money that comes to Wilkes and helps a lot of people, which is wonderful.

Commissioner Eddie Settle made a motion to approve Wilkes County Department of Social Services Energy Programs Outreach Plan for FY 2017-2018 as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner David Gambill and unanimously approved.

2. UPDATE – Mr. Blevins provided the Commissioners with handouts for May. He briefly went over the monthly caseload report, Foster Care financial report, Adoption Services financial report, Child Development and Subsidized Child Care financial report. He also went through the CPS Foster Care monthly reports for May.

Commissioner Gambill asked if trail placements are kinship placements with family members. Mr. Blevins replied it can be kinship placements or it could be that they are trying to reunite the child back with their family and it is a trial placement to see if they can work them back into the home. Vice Chairman Blevins stated in the article he read shared by Commissioner Settle Forsyth County has a program in which they have a special unit that works on trial placements

back into the home and it appears to be successful. Mr. Blevins replied they also read the article and he talked with Hal Wilson about going to Forsyth County to talk with them and find out more about this program. Commissioner Settle said they only have 168 foster kids. Mr. Blevins added they have a population of 300,000, which is amazing. Commissioner Settle agreed they have 3 times the population of Wilkes and have less kids in Foster Care, which is astounding. Vice Chairman Blevins agreed if it is truly an effective program and Wilkes could put this system in place to keep some of the kids in their family situation it would be great. Mr. Blevins agreed and said that Caldwell County which is closer to Wilkes in population use to have more children in Foster Care than Wilkes, but now they have less. They have talked about going to visit them as well to see how they accomplished this. He added this has been a problem in Wilkes for many years, they had over 200 children in Foster Care as far back at 2008. Mr. Blevins said they are always looking to see what they can change and do better to help this number decrease. Commissioner Settle added Durham only has 286 Foster Children with a population of over one million, and he agrees if Forsyth has an effective program Wilkes needs to look into it. Mr. Blevins added if it is effective he agrees, but Wilkes also must have the staff to run a program like this for it to work. He stated some of the larger counties are able to have an entire unit devoted to a program such as this that, and a smaller county may not have the resources to do the same. Mr. Blevins said currently they have 6 open Social Worker positions that need to be filled, which is another issue for them.

Commissioner Settle stated he is glad they are looking into this. Chairman Blevins agreed and added they understand the large counties do have many more resources. He asked if everyone uses basically the same criteria in determining what factors contribute to a child having to be placed in Foster Care. Mr. Blevins replied yes they all use the same manuals from the state. Vice Chairman Blevins added a Judge ultimately determines if the child goes into Foster Care. Mr. Blevins stated yes and the Judicial Districts can also make a difference as well. He said the number is large, it is concerning to them, they meet about this and talk about it often.

Vice Chairman Blevins said there is also many discussions about this being tied closely to problems with drugs. Chairman Minton added as well as poverty. Mr. Blevins stated 80% or more of their Foster Children cases have some sort of substance abuse, with most being opioid. He added the Board is correct, they need to be proactive and do everything humanly possible to protect children first and foremost, not take them into care if it is not needed, and look at all alternatives. Mr. Blevins said he will have more information about Forsyth and their program at the next monthly update.

Commissioner Elmore asked if they have issues as they did at one time with false reports being made, what percentage of their time are spent on these, and is there still no penalty for a false report being filed. Mr. Blevins replied it is not as high as it was at one time and is not much of an issue for them. He added it does happen, but they do not spend an inordinate amount of time doing this, but a lot of times it does happen in a custody battle. Commissioner Elmore said it would be good especially in the custody battles if there was a penalty. Mr. Blevins replied if it is malicious it can happen, but in most cases it does not because they do not want anyone afraid to make a report for the safety of all children.

Commissioner Elmore asked if they are currently 6 workers short at DSS. Mr. Blevins replied yes and all the jobs are now listed on the County's new website. He added they are also advertised on the Appalachian State website as well as the UNC School of Government website that is sent out all over the state. The openings are also listed at Employment Security NC Works Office. Mr. Blevins said they are actually interviewing today and tomorrow and hope to fill some of these vacancies soon. Mr. Yates stated that Mr. Blevins has worked very hard to get these job advertisements out locally and to colleges across the state. Vice Chairman Blevins asked if other counties are shorthanded. Mr. Blevins replied yes, especially the rural counties are struggling with this.

The Board thanked Mr. Blevins for his update.

ADJOURN – Motion was made by Commissioner Eddie Settle, seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 10:32 A. M.

Jerry Shepherd, Acting Clerk

Gregory A. Minton, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: