

**MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
October 5, 2021**

PUBLIC HEARING – PROPOSED ECONOMIC INVESTMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN WILKES COUNTY AND THE BLOCK – AMZ AMUSEMENTS, LLC – Chairman Eddie Settle declared the Public Hearing open regarding the proposed Economic Investment Agreement at 5:57 P.M. on Tuesday, October 5, 2021 with the following members present: Chairman Eddie Settle, Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner David Gambill, and Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson.

Also present were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; LeeAnn Nixon, EDC President; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Settle welcomed and recognized LeeAnn Nixon, EDC President and Michael Zulpo, Owner of The Block – AMZ Amusements, LLC. Ms. Nixon thanked the Board and stated they are pleased Mr. Zulpo has decided to work on an amusement center for youth. She added they are here for the small business grant. They are excited for the investment and job creation that is more than the average wage for amusement jobs in the county and meets the state average. This will be a great place for some full-time jobs and also part-time jobs for young people. Ms. Nixon said this is a great opportunity to serve the community with entertainment options for young people and will help attract more folks to the area. She added she has heard for years they need more things for the young people and are pleased to have them in Wilkes.

Mr. Zulpo thanked the Board and stated he is from Australia; his wife is a North Carolinian born and raised. They originally met at a 4H camp in Reidsville, years later they got married and have two kids. He added they had a holiday place in Wilkes and when the pandemic hit they decided to come and spend time here together as a family. After 6 months they decided they did not want to go back to Raleigh and enjoy the lifestyle in Wilkes. The schools are great. They sold their house and made this their home. Mr. Zulpo said part of the journey was looking for something for their kids to do and found there was very little outside of the outdoor activities and skiing in Boone. He added he and his wife got in touch with Ms. Nixon, contacted state development, brainstormed, and made local connections and saw there was a real need for this. As a commitment to their new community they decided to dive in and see if they can get something opened and have been working on this for the past few months. They both still have day jobs but the support has been phenomenal. Mr. Zulpo said they had 23,000 folks to view their one Facebook live video announcing The Block as the winning name and they are excited to bring this to Wilkes.

Mr. Zulpo said they want to make sure kids and families have a safe place to go and also bring economic development. They will have 8,000 sq. ft. of trampolines; ninja warrior course; 3 Birthday rooms, Toddler room for kids 4 under for soft play; 9,000 – 10,000 sq. ft roller skating rink; and eventually add a glow in the dark laser light putt-putt area in the basement. This is

located at the old Melody Square Town Square, and they are excited to bring life back to this building.

Mr. Zulpo said they appreciate the county helping them out financially and being one of the first small business to be involved in the Grant program. They look forward to being a part of the community. Chairman Settle stated they are all very excited. They get questions all the time and this week was asked why don't they get some entertainment for the children and he responded it's coming. They have heard in the past one of the drawbacks to recruiting young professionals to the county is something for their children to do. They have a lot of outdoor activities to offer but not indoors. Chairman Settle said this is a nice recruiting tool. Mr. Zulpo agreed and added they touch 8 counties and in their research they realized there is not one of these facilities in Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga. They will draw some of them and while they're here they may stop and eat or shop. Vice Chairman Minton added skating will be a great addition, something they have not had since they were young. Commissioner Gambill stated there were lots of out of county folks that commented on their Facebook live event, a lot of them will come. Commissioner Johnson said this will benefit the families in the county, the surrounding counties, the school system, and his own kids. They could not be more excited. Mr. Zulpo stated they plan to do a lot of outreach in the county for home schooling groups, special needs kids and their families with events just for them. They want everyone in the county to enjoy the facility in some capacity.

Chairman Settled asked if anyone would like to speak in regards to the Economic Investment Agreement for The Block – AMZ Amusements, LLC and hearing no comments he declared the Public Hearing closed at 6:09 P.M.

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, October 5, 2021 at 6:09 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Eddie Settle, Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton, Commissioner Keith Elmore, Commissioner David Gambill, and Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson.

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.

INVOCATION – Commissioner David Gambill led the Invocation.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion was made by Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton, seconded by Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on September 21, 2021.

BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS – Motion was made by Commissioner David Gambill to approve Budget Amendment No. 6 (General – DSS & Airport – This budget request is for Insurance reimbursement for damage from lightning strikes at DSS \$3,718 and the Airport

\$6,922); and Budget Amendment No. 7 (General – Social Services – Received an additional allocation for LIEAP-Low Income Energy Assistant of \$71,105. No County funds required). The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

THE BLOCK/AMZ AMUSEMENTS, LLC – ECONOMIC INVESTMENT AGREEMENT – Chairman Eddie Settle recognized Tony Triplett. Mr. Triplett stated this is the contract with the company that they heard from during the Public Hearing. He added this is the first contract under the new Small Business Development Grant Program and it took time to develop this contract and they will use it going forward. It is structured a little different than the usual economic incentive agreements because the program is different. The contract is modeled after the policy. Mr. Triplett said that policy was passed by the Board in May and includes this grant program. They took those guidelines and transferred them into this contract and included what AMZ Amusements is agreeing to do and upon completion of those requirements what the county will do. He added this project is within North Wilkesboro's Town limits so they split it. The county will pay \$2,500 and North Wilkesboro will pay \$2,500. Mr. Triplett said North Wilkesboro is going to use the contract he has drafted and if approved by the Board and they will also approve it. The \$2,500 from each is payable once the policy requirements have been met, which calls for 5 jobs and \$250,000 investment.

Mr. Triplett stated Mr. Zulpo has looked it over and agrees as well as Ms. Nixon and EDC. He added Ms. Nixon and Ms. Hamby both helped to get this agreement completed. Chairman Settle and the Board thanked Mr. Zulpo and stated they are glad to have them in the Great State of Wilkes.

Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson made a motion to adopt the Economic Investment Agreement between Wilkes County and The Block – AMZ Amusements, LLC as presented at today's meeting pursuant to N.C.G.S. §158-7.1. The Motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

BLUE RIDGE OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (BROC) – 1st QUARTER APPROPRIATION REQUEST – Chairman Settle recognized Dare Stromer, Executive Director and Mary Edna Faw. Ms. Stromer stated Ms. Faw has been their Interim Director and they have a new Director to introduce tonight. Kaitlyn Pruitt will be the new director and she will do a good job. Ms. Stromer thanked the Board of County Commissioners for all their support throughout the years since 1966. She stated their mission is still the same to be there for the people to help if they are about to be evicted, their power is going to be cut off, and to put food on the table. This is and will always be their mission even though they have had some problems that they are overcoming.

Ms. Stromer said they had some controversy and did had an employee that used their credit card for personal use. They have taken corrective action and their Board voted on July 8th to make sure this can never happen again. She added she is happy to report no county funds; no grant funds were used to offset this. Ms. Stromer said it was the funds they raised from BBQ's, Cake Walks, Bingo, shows, and many other fund raisers that they have had over the years. The Senior Nutrition program pays its expense and then is reimbursed one month later. She stated that

makes it hard to meet payroll and cover expenses so they build up a surplus. Chairman Settle asked if they have a waiting list. Ms. Faw replied yes. Chairman Settle stated Meals on Wheels is a valuable tool in the county, especially during the pandemic. He added he has gone with them as has Commissioner Elmore and Commissioner Gambill. Ms. Stromer said there are a lot that the only person they see is the one that delivers the meal and the only meal they get. She said it has been hard to raise funds during Covid, but they have done a lot on zoom to continue to raise funds.

Ms. Stromer said yesterday she received great news from the Insurance Company they are sending them a check for \$36,082.48 and it takes care of the funds taken. She added she is here tonight to ask for their first quarter appropriation from the county. Chairman Settle said this is \$14,203.75. Mr. Yates and Mr. Huffman replied that is correct. Commissioner Elmore asked if the Board would approve the full appropriation so they did not have to come back. Mr. Huffman stated that is typically how it works. Mr. Yates added it is paid out quarterly after the agency sends the county their request. Commissioner Gambill stated it is shame as much hard work as these ladies put in to have to go through this, and they know they have many years of service and dedication. They hate they had to go through this and appreciate what they do. Vice Chairman Minton agreed. Commissioner Gambill added they appreciate Ms. Faw coming back to get them through. Ms. Faw thanked the Board and stated it has been an adventure. Ms. Stromer agreed and added they are stronger for it.

Chairman Settle asked where do the funds come from for the senior meals. Ms. Stromer replied some comes from the County and from the Home Care and Community Block Grant, fund raisers, CARES, and First in Families. Ms. Faw added the original Block Grant is federal. The state adds to it and the match comes from the county so they can receive it. Chairman Settle asked if they can get more. Ms. Faw replied no, it goes to the state and then to the region and they divide it out by population to the counties. Chairman Settle said they hate to have seniors on a waiting list for meals. Ms. Faw said they get 10-15 per week and have about 200 on the waiting list. Commissioner Elmore stated a lot of the issue is the volunteers to take the meals, correct. They can pay for the all the food, but don't have the volunteers to deliver them. Ms. Faw replied sometimes they have money and no volunteers and sometimes they have volunteers and not enough money for the food. Ms. Stromer said the volunteers get reimbursed 45 cents per mile and their time is volunteer, that is a lot of wear and tear on the car. The folks that deliver meals are very dedicated and have the heart for it. Chairman Settle added many that volunteer are seniors. Commissioner Elmore asked isn't the funding tied to the volunteers and what they can deliver. Ms. Faw replied there was a program at one time called Meals on Wheels America and if they showed participation in March for Meals they had extra grant funds they could get based on the participation.

Commissioner Elmore asked if they participated in MerleFest. Ms. Stromer replied no they thought it was too dangerous to go and could not ask their staff to do that. Commissioner Elmore asked about the Paws program. The previous director started this and buying food for the pets of the folks they serve and can they provide information on this or what happened to this program. Ms. Stromer replied some of it is still going on. They have 10 clients that participate. They bought all the food with the grant money and donations they received and it is being stored at

Fairplains in two closets. The home delivery folks take it out once the clients request dog food, cat food, or even a collar. They will even take them to the Animal hospital if needed. They will continue it until the food runs out, but once it is gone they will focus on the Seniors to get that back up and going strong again. Ms. Faw added Meals on Wheels America had that program years ago, but she did not participate because they didn't have enough money to feed their people much less the animals. They do realize there is seniors that will do without their own food to feed their animals, but they can't do it all. Commissioner Elmore asked what about the money that was raised. Ms. Stromer said it was all spent on cat and dog food and they still have some left to give out when requested by a client. Commissioner Elmore asked how much was collected. Ms. Stromer replied around \$4,000 to \$5,000 total. Ms. Faw said one closet is dog food and the other is cat, it is in a safe dry place but they will need to give it out before it gets old.

Commissioner Johnson asked if they have any upcoming fund raiser events in the near future. Ms. Stromer replied they just finished one for the Apple Festival but they did not do good since they did not actually have an apple festival. They sold raffle tickets for a rifle. They are getting ready to do another online auction on Facebook soon. They come up with new things and do to raise funds. The Board thanked Ms. Stromer and Ms. Faw and they thanked the Board for their support.

Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton made a motion to approve annual Appropriation to Blue Ridge Opportunity Commission as approved in the 2021-2022 Budget when they make the request each quarter for funds, as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and unanimously approved.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES – UPDATE – Chairman Settle recognized John Blevins, DSS Director. Mr. Blevins said he has several updates for the Board before they go over the reports. The Family First Preventions Service Act became effective October 1st as he has mentioned before. Any child that goes into congregate care is only cover 14 days under IV-E and will be a big change. There are a few exceptions and as long as they were there before October 1st they are covered and the workers time is still covered. He added the Governor, House, and Senate all have bridge funding in their budgets for this. This is to help counties for the first 2 years without loss of revenue for the first year and 50/50 for the second. The goal is to allow counties to get systems in place to work with them and have more services before they have to take kids into care and try to prevent foster care. The more family foster homes they have helps as they are not restricted to 14 days. Mr. Blevins said VAYA gave them Family First funds to be used to prevent children from coming into care while involved in the investigation phase. They can help them get their home up to standard and provided \$4,812 to purchase furniture, pest control, baby equipment, and they even shipped supplies back to children that went to Arizona. He added VAYA also provided them 60 duffle bags for foster children with toiletries and other items for kids that come into care.

The next update is an allocation from the Consolidated Appropriations Act and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. Mr. Blevins said this is for Counties with an increase in Food and Nutrition benefits (FNS) which Wilkes had. The state sent an additional \$44,080.05. He added

the state is trying to find ways to spend money since it is the end of their fiscal year. The 2021 Thrifty Food Plan, which is beginning October 1st gives all household enrolled in FNS a 25% increase in benefits. This is the largest increase in history, it was last revised in 2006 and is a permanent 25% increase. The 15% increase for Covid ended September 30th and this 25% increase began October 1st. Pre Covid a family of 4 received \$680, with this 25% increase that family will now get \$835.

Mr. Blevins said next is Economic Security CARES Act Funding, this was awarded in April 2020. They have to have it obligated or paid by September 30th and each county was awarded based on population. The funds could only be used to ensure safety, permanency and wellbeing of children and families involved in child welfare during the pandemic. Wilkes was awarded \$25,205 and they were able to go back and look at anything charged to the county such as hotel, meals and expense for children they took into care and couldn't find placement. He added they were able to get \$8,266.94 back to the county. Mr. Blevins said it was restricted, but they were able to find \$13,454.02 of items that were approved such are car seats, booster seats, pack' n plays, Lowes Gift cards and PPE for Social Workers. Only \$2,400 went back to the state.

Supplemental LINKS funding is the next update and this was hard on the staff. He added on September 17th they received a Dear County Director letter instructing them to find young adults 18 but not yet 27 and were in foster care at the age of 14 or older. The intent is to provide a one-time unrestricted payment to eligible youth that may not have benefited from other Covid funds. Mr. Blevins said eligible adults age 18-20 will get \$2,500 and age 21-26 will get \$5,000 if found, identified, and funds encumbered by September 30th. He added they worked very hard and with the help and great work of Hal Wilson they found and identified 26 young adults ages 21-26 and 32 young adults 18-20 for a total of \$210,000 payments that will go out to their former foster children. This was to spend federal funds by the end of the federal fiscal year. They gave them a very short time frame that was difficult to meet, but they found a lot due to the hard work of DSS staff and the great data base Hal Wilson keeps.

Mr. Blevins said the next update is for the Foster Parent recruitment efforts in September. On September 3rd they posted flyers in downtown Wilkesboro and North Wilkesboro in shops and store windows. They created bookmarks and took to the public library to be distributed. They had a booth at the Ronda Roundabout, met folks and handed out information. They also attended the Pumpkin Festival. Hal Wilson and the Supervisor Autumn both went with them and they gave out promotional items and had 26 families express interest in possibly becoming a foster family. Social worker Meredith Cole is in training to license more foster homes after the state has finally opened this back up. They place yard signs around town for recruitment, running ads in the Journal Patriot, 3WC Radio, and soon will have a commercial on WXII. They will come to Wilkes to film it. They have ordered new promotion items to give out as well. Mr. Blevins stated they have done a lot of work that it not reflected in the numbers yet, hopefully soon the numbers will increase.

Mr. Blevins provided the Commissioners with handouts for August. 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 August.

The Board thanked Mr. Blevins for the updates and all they do.

JURY COMMISSION APPOINTMENT – Chairman Settle said the Jury Commission Appointment for Mr. Rocky Lyons is before the Board for consideration.

Commissioner Keith Elmore made a motion to appoint Mr. Rocky Charles Lyons to the Jury Commission for a 2-term from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2023 as presented. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Brian S. Minton and unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS – Commissioner Elmore stated the newly completed Hwy 268 road looks great but the sidewalks out in the county have grown over. He asked Mr. Yates to talk with the North Wilkesboro Manager and ask when they go out to clean up their sidewalk if they will extend down and take care of the county's sidewalks as well. Mr. Yates replied he will be happy to. Vice Chairman Minton added he saw on TV recently a discussion about litter and how bad it is all across the state of N.C. Commissioner Gambill said if the state would start back mowing that would help a lot as well.

ADJOURN – Motion was made by Commissioner David Gambill, seconded by Commissioner Keith Elmore and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 7:03 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Eddie Settle, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: October 19, 2021