



**MACON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
MARCH 14, 2023  
MINUTES**

Chairman Higdon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All Board Members, County Manager Derek Roland, Deputy Clerk Mike Decker, Finance Director Lori Carpenter and County Attorney Eric Ridenour were present, as were a number of county employees, media and citizens.

At 6:01 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Young, the board voted unanimously to recess the meeting to Courtroom A on the fourth floor of the Macon County Courthouse. Chairman Higdon reconvened the meeting at 6:08 p.m.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

(A) Mr. Roland announced that an adjustment would be made to the front end of the agenda with the addition of Item 5B due to the speaker having traveled from Atlanta to speak.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE:** Chairman Higdon requested all in attendance rise and a moment of silence was observed.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Led by Commissioner Shields, the pledge to the flag was recited.

**PUBLIC HEARING(S):** None

**GORAIL:** State Director Christy Sammon introduced herself and said her purpose for being here was to educate the board about GoRail services and grants that are available to Macon County. She invited board members to reach out to her to further discuss opportunities for partnering on projects to improve highways, railroad crossings and walking overpasses.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:** **Susan Carter** spoke about the proposed layout of the new Nantahala Public Library and access to the community room. She said the community club plans to use the room to provide craft classes, educational activities, potlucks, etc. as they do in their current location. Ms. Carter shared that the community club will only have access to half of the room in the new location which is not large enough for their needs and asked board members to intervene and find a way to give them full access.

**Stephanie McGaha** shared her concerns about Macon County Public Library. **Freda Bennett** spoke in support of the Pre-K program in Highlands. She said there are currently only 900 Pre-K slots in Macon County for approximately 1,800 children under the age of five. Commissioner Shearl responded with his support of the Pre-K program and clarified the prioritization of projects provided by the school liaison committee. **Gary Abrignani** inquired about the tax assessment process and how property values are determined. Tax Administrator Abby Braswell explained the procedural laws, rules and Schedule of Values, and encouraged concerned citizens and those with questions to come and talk to her or one of her staff in person. **Linda Herman** yielded her opportunity to speak about the tax assessment. **Claudia Aguilar** said she had requested a copy of the board's Code of Ethics and was pleased to see the topic on the agenda. **Jim Gaston** spoke about the Macon County Library suggesting that the board not continue the partnership with the Fontana Regional Library system. He recommended better salaries be considered for the employees if the contract with the Fontana Regional Library system is not renewed. **Hazel Norris** spoke about the Highlands Pre-K program and how the board has to prioritize spending. **Jerry Moore** spoke in support of the Highlands Pre-K program reminding board members that private citizens raised \$35,000 to do a feasibility study and requested funding for the project be put back on the agenda. Commissioner Young commented that he supports the project, but funding priorities presented by the school liaison committee did not include the project in the top five priorities. **Carter Davis** spoke in favor of the Highlands Pre-K project. **Deni Shephard** shared written remarks that he had presented to the Macon County Library Board earlier today and stated his issue was with the LGBTQ literature available in the library. **Robert Bull** yielded his opportunity to speak about property appraisals. **Jeff Weller** spoke in favor of the Highlands Pre-K program and stated he does not understand why the project is not in the top five since some of the other projects on the list have grant money or other funds to complete them. **Wendy McGaha** stated she was at the Macon County Library board meeting earlier today and indicated that some of those in attendance were not allowed in the room and those allowed in were not permitted to speak. She spoke about a book she had checked out of the library which she believes is very explicit and inappropriate for the teen section. Ms. McGaha said the board needed to pull out of the Fontana Regional Library System. **Virginia Cranfield** yielded her opportunity to speak about property appraisals. **Bonnie**

**Potts** shared information about the Highlands Literacy Program and stated her support for the Highlands Pre-K program. **Chip Reames** left the meeting before his opportunity to speak about K-1 Funding in Highlands. **Jim Osterle** spoke in favor of the Highlands Pre-K program.

**ADDITIONS, ADJUSTMENTS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Shields, the board voted unanimously to approve the agenda, as adjusted, as follows:

- To add Item 11F under New Business, Parks and Recreation discussion, per Commissioner Young
- To add Item 12(E) under Consent Agenda, Declaring the Service Weapon for Bill Edwards as surplus and sale of the same to him for \$1.00, per Deputy Clerk Mike Decker

**UPDATE ON MACON COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION ACTIVITIES** – Macon County Extension Director Christine Bredenkamp provided the board with an overview of the work that the local North Carolina Cooperative Extension office performs and introduced her staff who shared information about the services and programs they provide and how Macon County youth and adults benefit. Ms. Bredenkamp also provided board members with a brochure of services offered by the office.

**PROGRESS REPORT ON GEORGIA ROAD/SCALY MOUNTAIN AREA FIBER INFRASTRUCTURE BUILD** – Matt Saenger, the Director of Sales and Marketing for Balsam West provided the board with an update on the progress of the firm's efforts to build fiber infrastructure down the Georgia Road and into the Scaly Mountain area. He shared that they are currently in Phase II of the project with 253 connections in progress, 116 connections pending, and 193 prospects for internet and voice services. Mr. Saenger said he considers the project a huge success and indicated Balsam West has finished its response to the Nantahala RFP and hopes to receive a positive response.

**SKATE PARK PROJECT UPDATE** – Franklin Town Manager Amie Owens provided the board with an update on the proposed skate park project planned for the town's Whitmire Property. She said the proposed plan calls for \$50,000 in funding from the county in the upcoming budget year to assist in completing the project as quoted. Ms. Owens reminded board members that the original cost of the project was \$294,750 which was reduced to \$262,250 because the Town of Franklin was completing the grading and some other work. She said that after fundraising conducted by the youth of SK828, other donations, and receipt of a grant, the remaining balance is \$110,575 and the town has budgeted \$50,000 toward that amount. Ms. Owens indicated the grading is planned to be completed in May with an anticipated opening of the skate park in late summer. Commissioner Antoine made a

motion, seconded by Commissioner Young to fund the remaining balance of \$110,575 for the completion of the park. After discussion and clarification of the remaining balance, Commission Antoine amended his motion, seconded by Commissioner Young, to appropriate \$60,576 from the fund balance for the project. The vote was unanimous.

**DISCUSSION/CONSIDERATION OF MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT (MOA) WITH REACH** – Jennifer Turner-Lynn, the Assistant Director of REACH of Macon County, presented a proposed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the county and REACH with regard to human trafficking. She said the MOA notes that its purpose is to articulate the working relationship and partnership “in providing resources, comprehensive outreach, direct client services and systematic advocacy to human trafficking victims and their children.” Ms. Turner-Lynn stated this agreement will advance the grant opportunities for REACH [Attachment 1]. Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Young, to approve the MOA as presented. The vote was unanimous.

**RESOLUTION IN RECOGNITION OF MACON COUNTY CRAWFORD SENIOR CENTER VOLUNTEERS** – Department of Social Services (DSS) Director Patrick Betancourt presented a resolution recognizing the volunteers who serve at the Macon County Crawford Senior Center. The resolution proclaims April 16-22, 2023 as Macon County Volunteer Week [Attachment 2]. Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to approve the resolution as presented. The vote was unanimous.

**CONSIDERATION OF BID AWARD FOR MACON COUNTY TRANSIT FACILITY EXPANSION** - Macon County Transit Director Darlene Asher requested the board’s approval of a bid to expand the Transit Department facility at 36 Pannel Lane. Ms. Asher requested approval to enter into a contract with Owle Construction in the amount of \$715,000 [Attachment 3]. After discussion and clarification that the county is only responsible for 20 percent of the contract amount, Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Young, to approve the bid in the amount of \$715,000 and to authorize the county manager to enter into a contract with Owle Construction. The vote was unanimous.

**CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION ADOPTING A CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS** – Mr. Roland stated that the board had adopted a Code of Ethics in 2010 which is still in place and thanks to Ms. Aguilar’s request the code had been reviewed and Mr. Ridenour has proposed a more streamlined version for the board to consider. He said the code, along with the Rules of Procedure, and completion of ethics training by all board members ensures that the board is covered from top to bottom. Mr. Roland said the 2010 version of the Code of Ethics was eight pages long and the new version is one

page long. Mr. Ridenour said a Code of Ethics is required by Section 160A-86 of the North Carolina General Statutes and requested a motion to rescind the 2010 version and adopt the newly revised Code of Ethics [Attachment 4]. Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to resend the 2010 Code of Ethics. The vote was unanimous. Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, to approve and adopt the new Code of Ethics as presented. The vote was unanimous.

**CONSIDERATION OF BUDGET AMENDMENT REGARDING BOILER/CHILLER UNIT AT THE HUMAN SERVICES BUILDING**

– Mr. Roland stated that the boiler/chiller unit at the Human Services Building is 23 years old and was slated to be budgeted for replacement in FY24, but it is rapidly deteriorating and currently operating at 25 percent capacity so we have to replace it now. He said there is a 36-week lead time on the production of a new unit and the informal quote is for \$100,000 with the funding appropriated from the fund balance of the general fund. Ms. Carpenter reviewed the budget amendment for \$110,000 giving some leeway for inflation or unexpected additions. Commissioner Shields made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, to approve the budget amendment as presented to allocate \$110,000 from the fund balance of the general fund to purchase a 90-ton chiller unit for the Health and Human Services Building on Lakeside Drive. The vote was unanimous. Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shields, stating for the purchases of apparatus, supplies, materials or equipment, the Macon County Board of Commissioners delegates to the County Manager the authority to award contracts, reject bids or readvertise to receive bids on behalf of Macon County in accordance with NCGS 143-129 (a). The vote was unanimous.

**PARKS AND RECREATION DISCUSSION** – Commissioner Young asked recreation commission members Tim Crabtree and Jeff Weller to share information from the recreation commission meeting held this morning. Mr. Crabtree said that even though the previously proposed pickleball courts had been approved the commission members would like to take a step back and request a comprehensive plan for the entire recreation park. He indicated the tennis courts are cracking and need to be resurfaced or replaced and tennis players need a dedicated space for restrooms and changing areas. Mr. Weller stated all the buildings are outdated – sixty or so years old – and are frequently being repaired, but could be repurposed for other functions. He said the recreation park was forgotten after Parker Meadows was built and some aspects are beyond repair. After discussion, Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Antoine for the county manager to solicit requests for proposals for a master comprehensive site study for the recreation park. The vote was unanimous.

**CONSENT AGENDA:** Upon a motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Shearl, the board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as presented which includes: (A) Minutes of the February 9, 2023, continued session, the February 14, 2023, regular meeting and the February 21, 2023, continued session; (B) Budget Amendments #189-195; (C) Tax releases for the month of February in the amount of \$685.65; (D) Monthly ad valorem tax collection report for which no action is necessary; and (E) Declare the service pistol for Mr. Bill Edwards surplus and sale of the same to him for \$1.00.

**APPOINTMENTS:**

**(A) Economic Development Commission (3 seats)** – Commissioner Young made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Shearl to approve the reappointments of Brett Rogers and David Hubbs, and appoint Johnathan Hamlin to the Economic Development Commission. The vote was unanimous.

**CLOSED SESSION:** At 9:09 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Young, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session as allowed under NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) in order to preserve the attorney client privilege and NCGS 143-381.11(a)(6) to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee; or to hear or investigate a complaint, charge, or grievance by or against an individual public officer or employee. At 9:49 p.m., upon a motion by Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Young, the board voted unanimously to come out of the closed session and return to the open session.

**ADJOURN:** With no other business, at 9:50 p.m., upon a motion from Commissioner Shearl, seconded by Commissioner Antoine, the board voted unanimously to adjourn.

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Derek Roland  
Ex Officio Clerk to the Board

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Paul Higdon  
Board Chair