Caldwell County
North Carolina
Board of Commissioners Meeting

January 8, 2024 at 6:00 PM
City-County Chambers
905 West Avenue NW, Lenoir

MINUTES

Attendance:

Randy Church, Chairman
Mike LaBrose, Vice Chairman
Jeff Branch, Commissioner
Robbie Wilkie, Commissioner
David Lackey, County Attorney
Donald Duncan, County Manager
Abby Rich, County Clerk

Absent:

Donnie Potter, Commissioner

Call to Order
Chairman Church called the January 9, 2024 Board of Commissioners meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Public Comment Period
There was one individual signed up for public comment, Nicole Flanagin, but she opted not to speak when Chairman Church provided her the chance.

Chairman Church called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM for regular session.

Invocation
Pastor John R. Sawyer, of Ambassador Baptist Church provided the invocation for those in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Commissioner Robbie Wilkie led the Pledge of Allegiance for those in attendance.

Agenda Amendments from the Board, Manager & Public
The County Manager proposed two amendments to the agenda. The first amendment is an application for a grant for technology updates. The second amendment is a vote to declare a State of Emergency for the County due to anticipated severe weather. These were noted to be items 12 and 13 under the Consent Agenda.

Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to accept the agenda as the County Manager had

presented.
The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Items

1. CCC&TI Watauga Campus Overmatch Credit

The County Manager, Donald Duncan, asked the Board to endorse a letter on behalf of the Watauga Campus of CCC&TI for an over match credit in the amount of $139,000. Commissioner Branch asked if this had been done before, and the County Manager informed him that this was previously done in 2016. Dr. Poarch, President of CCC&TI was in attendance, but he did not have a comment.

Commissioner Wilkie made the motion to accept the letter.

The motion carried unanimously.

2. Building Outdoor Communities- WPCOG

Duncan Cavanaugh of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments came to the podium to present on a grant feasibility study for Building Outdoor Communities. Mr. Cavanaugh told the Board that the application amount is $25,000 and the feasibility study will examine a potential trail that would run along the Caldwell Railroad from Lenoir to Hickory's Riverwalk along US 321 and from Alex Lee Blvd on US 321 to 321-A, back to the Caldwell Railroad in Granite Falls. The City of Hickory is involved and they will be providing matching funds. Mr. Cavanaugh stated that they hope to hear good news about the grant application soon. Chairman Church asked if this study would allow the County to apply for future grant funding for areas outside of the feasibility study areas. Mr. Cavanaugh stated that there is a possibility of doing this. He continued by saying that the area for the feasibility study needs to be relatively small, but they tried to make it as wide as possible and that there could be more grants that come along that would make it possible to conduct more feasibility studies or to construct if it gets to that point. Commissioner Branch asked if there was a cost established if the grant does come through. Mr. Cavanaugh told Commissioner Branch that this is something they hope to find from the feasibility study. Chairman Church asked if Catawba County or Burke County had any stake in the grant. The County Manager provided that those counties do not.

Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to supply the 25% match for Caldwell County in the amount of $6,250 along with the City of Hickory's contribution of $1,250 towards this feasibility study for Building Outdoor Communities grant application.
The motion carried unanimously.

3. Mental Health Updates

Health Director Anna Martin came up to present about mental health. Ms. Martin informed the Board that mental health has been a priority from the Community Health Assessment for some time and mental health services was distinguished as the top need for most improvement. Ms. Martin continued by listing the agencies that serve as mental health and substance use providers for the County. The data was collected from NC Detect and the data being presented is from November 2022 through November 2023. Ms. Martin reviewed the data in each slide for the Board. Chairman Church asked Ms. Martin if the individuals who are not transferred to the hospital are included in the data. Ms. Martin stated that this data is not included in the data collected. Commissioner Wilkie asked where the statistics for suicidal ideation come from. Ms. Martin told Commissioner Wilkie that these statistics come from the State

and she used what was collected from the emergency department. Commissioner Wilkie then asked if this data is from the questions that are asked in the emergency department. Ms. Martin said that they were. Chiarman Church asked if this data is from Caldwell Memorial's emergency department alone. Ms. Martin, with help from Emergency Services Chief Dino DiBernardi, said the data should be by County of residence, regardless of hospital. Commissioner Wilkie said these are sad statistics and asked if there was a number people can call if they need assistance with mental health. Ms. Martin provided that anyone can call 988 for assistance. Additionally, Caldwell County RESTART is mostly substance abuse, but they can be contacted and the mobile crisis line can be called as well. Chairman Church said that the County should target the months with the highest rates of mental health issues to advertise the resources that are available for help. The Chairman continued by stating that this is a trend that continues to go up nationwide. Ms. Martin concluded her presentation by providing a list of resources that the Health Department and the Caldwell County School System currently offer for mental health. Chairman Church said that he appreciates that the County is looking at the Data and trying to do something.

4. Building Inspections Updates

Permitting Director Jason Murphy, came to the podium to provide updates about recent permitting data. Director Murphy told the Board the number of permits issued from 2021 to 2023. He continued by telling the Board that the total number if inspections completed in 2023 was 11,398. Next, Director Murphy provided a slide that showed the number of home permits from 2021-2023. He told the Board that permit valuations have increased 30.5% from 2021 to 2023. The County Manager told the Board that this year is the first year that the Permitting Office is completely self-sustaining based on fees. Chairman Church asked if the staff of five was in the field. Director Murphy told the Chairman that there is a staff of seven with five in the field and two in the office. Commissioner Branch said that he can tell things are going well because the number of calls he receives regarding permitting has decreased. He continued by saying that the Permitting Office is doing a good job and he is proud of them. Chairman Church said that it’s worth noting that if the trend continues to go up, they will need more help. There was a brief discussion about the need for housing in Caldwell County.

The Board thanked Director Murphy for coming.

5. A Year in Review

Public Information Officer Paige Counts came to the podium to show the "Year in Review" video. After watching the video, Vice Chairman LaBrose said this was a great story to tell. The Board thanked Ms. Counts.

Consent

Chairman Church turned the meeting over to the County Manager to present the Consent Agenda.

6. EMS Vehicle Maintenance and Repairs

$28,600 of FEMA reimbursement money moved to the Vehicle Maintenance line item to replace generators on the two oldest units, replacement of 3 HVAC units, and the unexpected replacement of 2 turbos on older units.

7. Flock Camera Contract

Flock has offered to lock the County into a contract for the next 5 years at the same amount as our current contract at $50,000.

8. Approval of K9's 4 Cops Grant Submission

Officer Dupell has submitted a grant application in the amount of $23,000 for two new K-9's.

9. Approval of StRAP Grant Submission

This application is in the amount of $500,000.

10. Roadside Litter Update

The Board was provided with a memo about the roadside litter program and the collection on secondary roads.

11. Approval of Minutes from December 4, 2023 Meeting

The approval of the December 4, 2023 meeting minutes was requested.

Item 12 was a grant for the Local Cyber Security Grant Program. 80% of all funds must be spent at the local level and the remaining 20% is used for Statewide funding. This grant is up to $200,000 and the County has a project that would need $165,000-$180,000 to upgrade the County's cybersecurity. This is a 100% grant with no match from the County.

Item 13 is the SOE for the winter weather event tomorrow.

Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to accept the consent agenda as presented. Commissioner Branch expressed concern with how the EMS vehicles are being driven. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn

With there being no more business to attend to, Commissioner Wilkie made the motion to adjourn at 6:56 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.