Caldwell County
North Carolina
Board of Commissioners Meeting

March 11, 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
Donnie Potter, Commissioner
David Lackey, County Attorney
Donald Duncan, County Manager
Abby Rich, County Clerk

Absent: Robbie Wilkie, Commissioner

Call to Order
Chairman Church called the Board of Commissioners Regular Session to order at 6:10 PM.

Public Comment Period
The public comment period began at 6:04 PM. There were two individuals signed up for public comment.

The first individual to speak was John Nichols. Mr. Nichols spoke about Tri-County Motor Speedway and his support for the County. Mr. Nicholas continued by saying he was there for the years when there was a boom at the Speedway and the years that it went downhill. He also stated the new owners are a good asset to the community and he is at this meeting simply as a fan. He spoke about the shortages the Speedway faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and mentioned the grant funding that was received to assist with facility updates. Mr. Nichols told the Board the owners of the Speedway have indicated they had opportunities for events, but had to turn them down due to the inability to operate during the week. Mr. Nichols thanked the Board.

Rhonda Marsh was the next individual to speak. Ms. Marsh came to speak about an event that she is organizing called the Caldwell Faith Fair that will be hosted at the Caldwell Fairgrounds. Ms. Marsh mentioned the events that would be taking place during the fair, including games, vendors, and food trucks. She continued by stating everything is free other than the vendors and food trucks. Ms. Marsh said she is doing this as an act of faith and asked if the County would sponsor the fair. The Board thanked Ms. Marsh for coming and putting the information together. Ms. Marsh thanked the Board.

Invocation

Caldwell County Chaplain, Jason Hines, provided the invocation for those in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance
Commissioner Jeff Branch led the Pledge of Allegiance for those in attendance.

Agenda Amendments from the Board, Manager & Public
There were no proposed amendments to the agenda.
Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to adopt the agenda as presented by the County Manager and Clerk.
The motion carried unanimously.

1. Recognition of Retirees

Chairman Church recognized the recent retirees that were in attendance, and those that could not make it to the meeting. Those retirees were:

Kaiser Isbell	*Caldwell County Sheriff's Office*
Patricia Hall	*Department of Social Services*
Diana Kirk	*Caldwell County Health Department*
Sharon Alley	*Caldwell County Health Department*
Janie Mangum	*Department of Social Services*
Deborah Clark	*Department of Social Services*
Eric Byrd	*Caldwell County Sheriff's Office*
Tina Green	*Department of Social Services*
C.V. Morris	*Department of Social Services*
Lucy McCarl	*Department of Social Services*
Audrey Frazier	*Department of Social Services*
Teresa Spears	*Department of Social Services*
Matthew Mace	*Caldwell County EMS*

Chairman Church also noted the approximate combined years of service between all of the retirees was 345 years.
The Board thanked the previous employees for their time served with Caldwell County.

2. Tri-County Motor Speedway

Ronnie Crate Payne came to the podium, thanked the Board for their time, and introduced Senator Eddie Settle. Mr. Settle addressed the Board about the North Wilkesboro Speedway. He told the Board that his goal as a Commissioner was to get the track fixed and that when the track left in 1996 it was a hollow place. Mr. Settle continued by telling the Board in 2013 he began to campaign for the track, and in 2016, the momentum picked up with some major players, such as Dale Earnhardt Jr. getting on board.

In 2022 they had a month of racing and the attendance was twice what had been estimated. Senator Settle said grown men stood in the stands and cried. The NASCAR All Star Race brought in $100,000,000 to the area from room, meals, etc. When it was announced that the North Wilkesboro Speedway would be hosting the All Star Race, every hotel in Surry County was booked in an hour. Senator Settle asked if there were any questions from the Board. Vice Chairman LaBrose said that they have done a great job and the Speedway looks great. Chairman Church thanked Senator Settle for coming.

Senator Dean Proctor then came to the podium. He said that he grew up going to Hickory's Speedway. He continued by saying he knows what a speedway can be for a family. Senator Proctor told the Board that Tri-County Motor Speedway is going to ask for a review of their requirements and that he believes they deserve it. He asked for the Board's consideration on the review of the Racetrack and Drag Strips Ordinance and said that it's a pleasure representing Caldwell County.

Shad Higgins with Tri-County Motor Speedway came to the podium. He said that 2024 is looking to be a great year for the Speedway. There will be multiple events hosted that will air on television. Mr. Higgins said that Tri-County Motor Speedway will be the premier short track and this will have a great impact on Caldwell County. Mr. Higgins told the Board that they want to continue being a great neighbor and community member, and briefly mentioned all of the programs the Speedway donates to and other community efforts they are involved in. He said that they would appreciate a review of the current Ordinance. It was noted that the Speedway does not want to operate on Sunday's. Mr. Higgins then continued to ask for a review, told the Board they have proved they are a great neighbor, and stated Tri-County is ready to be beneficial to the County. The Board thanked Mr. Higgins for coming.

3. Naming of Unnamed Road- Woodstone Dr.

GIS Administrator, Micah Kelly, came to the podium. Mr. Kelly told the Board that this is an unnamed road and per Board request, the homeowners have revised the name from Woods Rd. to Woodstone Dr. There are 6 out of 8 landowners that have voted in favor of the name Woodstone Dr.
Chairman Church declared the public hearing open and with there being no individuals signed up for comment, the public hearing was declared closed.
Commissioner Branch made the motion to name the unnamed road Woodstone Dr.
The motion carried unanimously.

4. Target Industries Updates

Caldwell County Economic Development Director, Ashley Bolick, came to the Podium to provide a brief update on target industries for Caldwell County. Mrs. Bolick said one of the key steps in recruiting is understanding who the target industries are. The target industries when Mrs. Bolick arrived a little over a year ago were Wood Technology and Furniture, Green Technology, Biotechnology, Textiles, Data Centers, Food Processing, and Plastics. This list was last updated in July of 2011. There was a new evaluation conducted based on 3 criteria. Those criteria were local concentration, past growth performance, and average salaries. The industries were then ranked according to this criteria and input from Economic Development Advisory Committee. Plastics was ranked as number 1, Textiles was ranked as number 2, Wood Technology and Furniture were ranked as numbers 5 and 6. Data Centers, Food Processing, and Biotechnology are doing well, they are just represented in low quantities. The recommendation is to remove Green Technology and Biotechnology was renamed to Biopharmaceuticals as this is more relevant to local employers. In addition, Emerging Technologies and Aerospace have been added to this list as well. Wood Technology and Furniture, Food Processing, Textiles, and Plastics are being kept and placed under the header of Advanced Manufacturing. The next steps are to update the website and marketing resources, and to research, evaluate, and recommend improvements to the incentive structure.

5. Golden Leaf Foundation Grant Pre-Application for Economic Development

Economic Development Director, Ashley Bolick, presented a potential grant funding

opportunity with the Golden Leaf Foundation that would require no local match. The Golden Leaf Foundation is working to strengthen North Carolina's supply of products. The application is for a due diligence grant for up to $50,000 for the Foothills Regional Airport and for up to $1,500,000 in grading for the Evergreen Industrial Park. The only expense is the grant administration cost and this expense would come out of the Economic Development budget. If awarded the grant, 5% would go to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments for their assistance in writing the full grant application.

Commissioner Potter made the motion to approve the application for the Golden Leaf Foundation Grant.
The motion carried unanimously.

Consent

6. Board of Equalization and Review 2024

This resolution ratifies the appointments made at the February 12th Board of Commissioners meeting.

7. Computer Equipment Purchase for County Plaza and ROD

A server that runs most of the County Office needs to be replaced as it's 22 years old and cannot be updated anymore. There is a $200,000 grant the County has applied for, but the Board is being asked for the funding in case the grant does not go through. $216,180 of the budget revision will come from a Fund Balance Appropriation and the other $100,000 comes from a Fund Balance Appropriation from the Register of Deeds.

8. Roadside Litter Pickup

So far in 2024, there has been over 6,000 pounds of litter picked up off of the roadways. Commissioner Branch asked if the gas funds were not enough to cover the cost of the litter pick-up. The County Manager told Commissioner Branch that the funds are enough, however, the County did not budget enough because the service is being used more than estimated. Commissioner Potter asked if the contracting company was short handed last year and the County Manager confirmed this. Chairman Church asked for the total with adding the $50,000. The total would be $90,000. Chairman Church noted that there has been criticism about the County not doing enough about the littering issue, but the County is spending $90,000 a year. Commissioner Potter added that the roads being cleaned are secondary State roads and the State does not clean these roads. Chairman Church concluded by stating the County needs everyone's help to fight the issues with litter.

9. Building Outdoor Communities Grant Acceptance

The County was awarded this grant in the amount of $25,000. Caldwell's local contribution is $6,250 and the City of Hickory has agreed to contribute $1,250.

10. Animal Care and Enforcement use of Donated Funds

Animal Care and Enforcement is requesting to use $1,000 in donated funds to purchase rabies vaccines and syringes for its upcoming Rabies Vaccination Clinic.

11. Emergency Management Grant

$55,000 in awarded grant funding will be utilized to purchase portable facilities.

12. Fire Department Radio Purchase

$850,000 was awarded to the County by the State. This funding will provide for 28 mobile and 131 portable radios for the County Fire Departments. Various vendors were reviewed for pricing. The purchase will put 8 portable and 2 mobile radios at each station. The County will own these for 5 years and then they will become property of these fire departments.

13. Sheriff's Office Purchase of Detective Vehicle

The Sheriff's Office is requesting to use Asset Seizure funds to purchase a detective vehicle in the amount of $22,600.

14. Appointments to Grace Chapel Relief Board

Grace Chapel Fire Department is requesting the appointment of Aaron Haas and Jerry Teague to the Fire Department's Relief Fund Board.

15. Approval of Mowing Contract

The contract for mowing services was bid out twice. Hatton's Mowing Service was the lowest bidder and awarded the contract. The amount of the contract is $181,620.

16. Approval of Audit Contract with Martin & Starnes

The approval of the audit contract with Martin and Starnes is requested.

17. Approval of Minutes from February 12, 2024, Meeting

Approval of the minutes from the January 8th, 2024 meeting was requested.

Commissioner Potter said the County needs to look at the mowing contract harder next budget season and possibly bring this service in house. There was discussion about the cost of doing this. Chairman Church said the County would need more than two people to complete the mowing. There was then a brief discussion about the use of prisoners to conduct labor and why this is no longer a practice of local governments.

Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to accept the consent agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn

With there being no more business to attend to, Commissioner Potter made the motion to adjourn at 7:11 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.