Caldwell County
North Carolina
Board of Commissioners Meeting

May 13, 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
Robbie Wilkie, Commissioner
David Lackey, County Attorney
Donald Duncan, County Manager
Abby Rich, County Clerk

Call to Order
Chairman Church called the regular session to order at 6:04 PM. He welcome those in attendance and watching from home.

Public Comment Period
At 6:01 PM Chairman Church opened the meeting for the Public Comment Period. Mr. Ronnie Crate Payne came to the podium to share that Tri-County Speedway has purchased twenty 20-foot tall poles to begin putting up a sound barrier on the back side of the Speedway. Mr. Payne indicated that Tri-County spent approximately $16,000 for the poles and it will be a large cost to complete this project. Mr. Payne continued by telling the Board that the testing the Speedway is asking for will assist in generating revenue to complete the project. Mr. Payne noted there were 97 race cars in attendance at the race the previous Saturday and the attendance has been great. He indicated that Tri-County has not been able to put back the money needed for the sound barrier because of operational costs. Mr. Payne also told the Board that several professional teams are asking for practice times and Tri-County would appreciate anything the Board can do to assist with more practice time.

Invocation
Pastor Jerry Stines of Solid Rock Baptist Church was absent from the meeting. Vice-Chairman LaBrose provided the invocation in Pastor Stines' absence.

Pledge of Allegiance
Commissioner Donnie Potter led the Pledge of Allegiance for those in attendance.

Agenda Amendments from the Board, Manager & Public
County Manager Donald Duncan indicated there was an amendment to agenda. This

amendment would be Item 2b, a Proclamation for EMS Week 2024.
Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to adopt the agenda as the County Manager had presented.
The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Items

1. Communities in Schools

Keith Hindman, director of Communities in Schools, (CIS), for Caldwell County Schools came to the podium to present information showing what the CIS program has done over the 2023-2024 school year. Mr. Hindman told the Board the number of students that CIS serves and that the graduation rate last year was 91%. Mr. Hindman then reviewed the students' rate of success, community service projects, professional development of staff, character education, and the mentor program. Mr. Hindman said he appreciates the funding provided by the County. Vice Chairman LaBrose said that he knows the CIS program is making a difference and thanked Mr. Hindman for this.
Commissioner Potter told Mr. Hindman about the reading buddy program with the Public Library and mentioned that CIS may be able to partner with them to get mentors.
The Board thanked Mr. Hindman for coming.

2. Older Americans' Month

April Wiles-Williamson with DSS, came to the podium to read the proclamation for Older Americans' Month 2024.
Chairman Church made the motion to adopt the proclamation as read.
The motion carried unanimously.

2b. Proclamation for EMS Week

EMS Chief Jonathan Cook came to the podium and said they wanted to celebrate the EMS staff. Chief Cook read the proclamation for EMS Week 2024 for those in attendance.
Commissioner Potter made the motion to adopt the proclamation as read.
The motion carried unanimously.

3. Construction Contract with Atriax for Cajah's Mtn. EMS Base

Simon Lucas of the Atriax Group came to the podium to provide an update on the Cajah's Mtn. EMS Base project. The updates included that the architechtual and mechanical/engineering/plumbing are at 100% completion and civil is at 98% completion. They have created a construction schedule for the project, and the contract is completed and is ready to be approved and signed by the County. Mr. Lucas showed the Board a walk-through rendition of the floor plan and provided a brief description of the areas as the rendition played. Mr. Lucas then provided the total construction cost is $4.58 million and the construction schedule would be 311 working days and 62.2 working weeks. The estimated completion of the project is July 2025. Mr. Lucas then visited a list of "next steps" and announced the groundbreaking ceremony will be Friday, May 31st.

Commissioner Potter asked Mr. Lucas if the hallway had been widened as discussed in a previous meeting. Mr. Lucas provided that the hallway had been widened.
Commissioner Potter then expressed concern about one of the training room doors opening infront of another training room door. Mr. Lucas told Commissioner Potter that he would look into this.

Commissioner Branch asked Mr. Lucas why they are putting bedrooms in the facility and expressed concerns about the cost of adding these bedrooms. Chairman Church stated that EMS is looking at going to hybrid shift schedule that would include 24 hour shifts and the bedrooms would provide space for these employees to rest during any rest periods. The discussion continued and Commissioner Branch made comments that the two previous EMS bases constructed did not have bedrooms. The County Manger said these bedrooms would be beneficial for emergency situations including inclement weather. Commissioner Branch then said that he is all for the EMS base being constructed, but he is concerned with saving the taxpayers money if the bedrooms are not needed. Caldwell County Emergency Services Logistics Chief, Jeff Cardwell, came to the podium to explain why they had designed the Base to include bedrooms. His explanation provided the building was designed with the intention of it lasting 50 years. He also provided they wanted to be able to meet the needs of a growing EMS team that would be needed to meet the needs of a growing population. Chief Cardwell also said that if EMS integrates 24-hour shifts, they have to have bedrooms to comply with code. He continued by saying he wants this building to be something the community and County are proud of, and he would like to use it as a recruiting tool for potential employees. Conversation continued between Commissioner Branch and Chief Cardwell. Interim Emergency Services Chief, Trevor Key, came to the podium to further elaborate on why this EMS base would be a good recruiting tool for the County. Chief Key said approximately 85-90% of the EMS staff stated they preferred 24-hour shifts in a recent poll taken among staff. Chief Key also indicated that these living quarters would be used more for downtime than a place for sleeping.

Commissioner Branch said he feels that not putting bedrooms in the other EMS bases was a mistake if they are needed in this base. The County Manager noted EMS is changing fast and with a higher need from an aging population, and with a higher demand, the County will have to adapt. Commissioner Potter noted that his understanding in previous years was that the EMS employees did not actually sleep while on shift, but the beds provided them a place to rest. Commissioner Branch maintained that his opinion is this space is a lot of wasted money.

Chairman Church said if the County stays with 12-hour shifts, these rooms could be an opportunity for office space or additional storage for the facility. Commissioner Potter thanked the EMS staff for their comments. Commissioner Potter stated this project would not have been possible without the efforts of Cajah's Mountain Mayor, Ronnie Setzer, who was in attendance for the meeting.

4. Construction Contract with Atriax for Cajah's Mtn. EMS Base

Simon Lucas remained at the podium. Chairman Church asked if the Board would be provided a list of subcontractors and asked if the Board could tour the building while it's under construction. Mr. Lucas told the Chairman that they could provide the subcontractors and tours would be permitted during construction.

Commissioner Potter made the motion to approve the contract with the Atriax Group. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Capital Project Ordinance for Cajah's Mtn. EMS Base

The County Manager explained the budget revision for the Capital Project Ordinance for the Cajah's Mtn. EMS Base to the Board. He indicated there are funds from multiple sources going into this project. These funds include fund balance left over from the

Animal Care facility, sales tax revenues that had been held back for a project such as this, the municipal partnership with Cajah's Mtn., and a small amount of funding from NCDOT from their program that provides driveways for EMS and fire bases. The total project is 5.2 million, but the construction cost being approved is 4.58 million. There was a brief discussion about the private-public partnership with the land behind the EMS base.

Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to approve the EMS Base budget revision and project ordinance.
The motion carried unanimously.

6. Honoring Sherry Griffin

The County Manager did not read the resolution to keep it a surprise for Mrs. Griffin. The County Manager noted that Mrs. Griffin has done an amazing job in her role with WPCOG. He also added that Mrs. Griffin has led many large regional projects and infrastructure grants, and she has excellent skills in economic development and grant writing. Additionally, Mrs. Griffin is a coach for communities, and she has helped tremendously with water infrastructure in the region.
Commissioner Potter made the motion to approve the resolution.
The motion carried unanimously.

7. Opposing City of Charlotte Interbasin Transfer Request

The County Manager provided a brief background about the Interbasin Transfer Request from the City of Charlotte. Charlotte is asking for an additional 33 million gallons of water per day in addition to the amount already pulled from the Catawba River Basin. The County Manager provided that a previous IBT request significantly changed the State's law for more publicity of these requests. The County Manager then told the Board that the first meeting public meeting in the region was standing room only and several individuals were turned away. He stated future generations will be significantly affected if the request is approved. The County Manager also stated that this will be a long fight, but it's important to stick together as a team. The County Manager ended his comments by telling the Board the County will be asked to contribute funding to fight the request, if and when the time comes.

Chairman Church read the last paragraph of the Resolution opposing the IBT request from the City of Charlotte.
Chairman Church made the motion to approve the resolution.
The motion carried unanimously.

8. Water Purchase Agreement with the City of Lenoir

The County Manager told the Board the City of Lenoir approved the agreement for the water purchase at their last regular meeting. This agreement is a 10-year renewal and the fee for using more water than allocated has increased.
Commissioner Wilkie made the motion to adopt the water purchase agreement.
The motion carried unanimously.

9. MOA with City of Lenoir for Joint Communications Center

The County Manager provided that the State has provided funding in support of a Joint Operations and Dispatching Center for the County and the City of Lenoir. This center will provide services for the NC Department of Insurance, NC Office of the State Fire Marshal, NC Emergency Management, NC National Guard Cybersecurity Team, NC

VIPER, and others. The County Manager continued by saying Caldwell County would be the center of emergency management in Western NC. He also noted that E-911 funding is dropping for the City of Lenoir. The County Manager explained that this would be a reverse grant for the City of Lenoir, and the City will pay the County $771,000 in the first year, $620,000 in the second year, $465,000 in the third year, $310,000 in the fourth year, and $155,000 in the fifth year. In previous absorptions, the County did not receive any compensation. The County Manager said this is a key part of the process to receive grant funding from E-911 that would pay for all the custom- made switches and servers that run the 911 dispatching system and is a way to get tax dollars back to the community.

Commissioner Wilkie made the motion to adopt the MOA for a Joint Communications Center with the City of Lenoir.
Commissioner Wilkie stated the County has been having issues with communications lately due to old equipment and its important to have a new Communication Center that would help improve these issues.
The motion carried unanimously.

10. Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP) Grant Application

The County Manager told the Board the ATIIP is a new grant program from WPCOG to work with municipalities to connect pedestrian pathways. Other communities have already passed and approved this resolution.
Commissioner Potter made the motion to approve the grant application.
The motion carried unanimously.

11. Adoption of Ordinance Revisions

The County Manager reviewed the ordinances by reading through the list of those that were proposed at the last regular meeting. The County Manager also thanked several departments for their work on this project.

Commissioner LaBrose made the motion to adopt the Chapters: Alcoholic Beverages on County Property, Begging and Soliciting Prohibited, Minimum Housing and Non-Residential Buildings, State of Emergency, Animal Care and Enforcement, Building Code Inspections, Concealed Weapons on County Property, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, Fire and Life Safety, Noise Regulations, Racetracks and Dragstrips, Public Water Systems, and Septage Collection, Transportation, and Disposal, and that we repeal any other ordinances under Alcoholic Beverages on County Property, Begging and Soliciting Prohibited, Minimum Housing and Non-Residential Buildings, State of Emergency, Animal Care and Enforcement, Building Code Inspections, Concealed Weapons on County Property, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, Fire and Life Safety, Noise Regulations, Racetracks and Dragstrips, Public Water Systems, and Septage Collection, Transportation, and Disposal, and that the County Manager has the authority to make any typographical error changes, non-substantial corrections, and any numbering, renumbering, or formatting as a result of codification.

The motion carried unanimously.

Consent

12. Purchase of Buiding Inspections Software

This is a budget revision in the amount of $9,000 for the software system used by Building Inspections. The County currently has a legacy software system that must be maintained and its data needs to be moved over to the new cloud-based version.

13. Reappointment of Jerry Church to CCC&TI Board of Trustees

Jerry Church requested reappointment to the CCC&TI Board of Trustees.

14. NRA Grant

A submission of a grant application is being requested. The grant could provide $25,000 towards the cost of paving the driveway and parking area at the Caldwell County Sheriff's Office Range. If granted, a match of $14,000 would be required from the County.

15. Approval of Minutes from April 9, 2024, Meeting

The approval of the April 9th meeting minutes is requested.

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

Closed Session Pursuant to § 143-318.11 (a)(6)

At 7:26 PM, Chairman Church made the motion to enter into closed session pursuant to § 143-318.11 (a) (6) to discuss a personnel matter with the County Attorney, County Manager, Deputy County Manager, County Clerk, Chief Financial Officer, Human Resources Director, and any other personnel that may attend. Commissioner Potter provided a second to this motion.
The motion carried unanimously.

At 7:42 PM, Vice Chairman LaBrose made the motion to return to open session.
The motion carried unanimously.

Open Session

The topic of discussion upon returning from closed session was to discuss the position of Emergency Services director. Vice Chairman LaBrose said it's to soon to determine if the position is needed or not and there will be a large undertaking when the new Communications Center is constructed, but he also doesn't want to string any individual along. He continued by saying he can't make a decision on whether the position is needed right now. Commissioner Wilkie said this position can go either way. He said having the position helps with continuity, and several department leaders want the position, but it isn't needed. Commissioner Branch commented that someone is needed that is accountable over the departments, even if it needed to be split up. Vice Chairman LaBrose said that EMS will have the largest department out of all of those at Emergency Services. He also said that Fire Marshal and Communications could run as departments by themselves, but there are opportunities that the County has not even addressed. The Vice Chairman also indicated that he thinks it's the County Manager's decision on what to do with the position. Commissioner Potter said he is okay with the decision either way and added to Commissioner Branch's point that EMS is large and expressed concern about the department. Commissioner Potter said he believes there was a management problem in the past. Commissioner Branch said he thinks leadership had a large impact on the amount of turn over discussed previously in the meeting.

Commissioner Potter said there was a lot of micromanaging going on in the department, and he agrees with Commissioner Wilkie's comment that the department could go with or without the position. Commissioner Potter continued by saying having one position helps the County Manager with only having one department head to communicate with. He also stated he believes that Communications is going to become so large that it needs a director. Commissioner Wilkie said that he's seen Communications under several departments and believes it needs to be its own department. Commissioner Potter said that this position is going to have to go to the State for issues and still operate day to day operations and EMS needs to be managed tighter than it in the past. Commissioner Potter also said he would prefer Chief Key remain as interim until July so they don't have to make a quick decision. Vice Chairman LaBrose asked if the County Manager could provide some scenarios for what the structure could look like. Chairman Church said that this is a County Management decision about what needs to be done. Commissioner Potter said that individuals he has spoken with have been half-and-half about whether the position is needed. The County Manager said restructuring has been great for some departments and provided specific examples of successes. He continued by saying he believes this position provides an opportunity and his thought was to have a longer interim, then do an assessment of the department with an assessment center. The County Manager also said the new Communications Center will be its own structure with Communications. There was a discussion about the survey sent to EMS employees to receive input about changes that needed to happen. Commissioner Wilkie stated this position handles a lot each day, and it's nice when it's one department so they can work together. He continued by saying the County departments are working better together now than they ever were before. Vice Chairman LaBrose said he's okay with the longer interim. Other topics of discussion were the spending of EMS funds, morale of EMS employees, scheduling, and compensation.

The consensus of the Board was for the County Manager to come up with possible scenarios for the structure of the Emergency Services management team and bring those to each member.

Adjourn

Commissioner Branch made the motion to adjourn at 8:20 PM.
The motion carried unanimously.