

Surry County Board of Commissioners  
Meeting of July 19, 2021

The Surry County Board of Commissioners met at 6:00 p.m., July 19, 2021. The meeting was held in the Board Room, Historic Courthouse, Dobson, N.C.

Board members present in-person for the meeting were Chairman Mark Marion, Vice-Chairman Bill Goins, Commissioner Larry Johnson, Commissioner Van Tucker and Commissioner Eddie Harris.

Others present in-person for the meeting, at various times, were:

Chris Knopf, County Manager  
Sandy Snow, Assistant County Manager  
Ed Woltz, County Attorney  
Penny Harrison, Tax Administrator  
Daniel White, Parks & Recreation Director  
Jessica Montgomery, Public Works Director  
Martha Brintle, MIS Director  
Sheriff's Office Staff  
Nikki Hull, DSS  
Terri Weddle, DSS  
Nathan Walls, Assistant to the County Manager

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Chairman Marion called the meeting to order. Commissioner Harris delivered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Commissioner Harris announced the birth of his second grandchild.

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Chairman Marion requested the Board review and approve the agenda. Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to approve the July 19, 2021 agenda.

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Chairman Marion requested the Board consider the minutes of the June 21, 2021 Board meeting as presented. Upon motion of Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes as written.

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Chairman Marion requested the Board consider the consent agenda. Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the consent agenda as follows:

Requests from the County Manager:

- Approve the following from the Tax Department:
  1. Total releases for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$1,288.13.
  2. Total refunds for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$1,566.87.
  3. Total NCVTS tag and tax refunds for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$3,065.68.
  4. Total real and personal property discoveries for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$7,396.26.
  5. Total motor vehicle discoveries for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$0.
  6. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC additions for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$65,107.98.
  7. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC refunds for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$52.17.

8. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC releases for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$750.
  9. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC collections for the month ending 6/30/2021 in the amount of \$13,440.45.
- Appoint Vice Chairman Goins as the County's alternate voting delegate for the 2021 NCACC Conference.

Requests from the Assistant County Manager:

- Approve an additional \$5,000 for services provided by IT Consulting.
- Approve workers' compensation settlement activity, totaling \$96,482.95, for the quarter ending June 30, 2021.
- Approve to renew a rental lease for Shiki's of Elkin for a period of three years with one additional option to renew at a monthly lease of \$3,300.

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Chairman Marion declared the meeting to be an open forum and invited members of the audience to address the Board on any matters of civic concern. He read from the Board Rules and Procedures, explaining that he would be implementing a rule going forward allowing 3 minutes per speaker, with up to 30 minutes total for the open forum.

J.T. Henson congratulated Commissioner Harris on the birth of his grandchild. He also thanked Chairman Marion for implementing the 3 minutes per speaker rule after recent meetings featured lengthy open forums. Mr. Henson urged that progress be made on a proposed nuisance ordinance to address abatement at properties on Sherry Lane, Galax Trail and at Turner Mountain.

Nevada Love spoke out against glass recycling being discontinued at the Westfield container site. She said that citizens now must drive farther to the Surry County Landfill to dispose of glass and asked if funding from the litter budget could be used to provide glass disposal services at the Westfield container site.

Beth Shaw congratulated Commissioner Harris on the birth of his grandchild. She discussed substance abuse issues in Surry County and said they need to be better addressed. Ms. Shaw said that two people die each day from overdoses in Surry County, a figure that was disputed by the Board at their previous meeting. She said she attended a recent Birches Foundation picnic that was held for surviving family members of substance use victims. Ms. Shaw said that Birches Foundation assists 621 people with substance use issues. She asked the Board to acknowledge the County's substance use issues in their hearts and allocate funding to address the epidemic.

Caroline Hanlon, who said she works with Wendy Odum with the Birches Foundation, questioned the efforts of the Substance Abuse Recovery Department. She asked about the use of vehicles that were acquired for the Substance Abuse Recovery Department's transportation network. Ms. Hanlon made direct comments toward the department and its staff.

Steven Ray Odum voiced his disagreement with the Board's use of the word egregious to describe overdose death numbers at the last Board meeting. (The Board disputed that two people each day are dying from overdoses in Surry County - a statistic that Mr. Odum's wife has stated.) Mr. Odum said what is egregious are Surry County's statistics for hepatitis, overdoses, the number of pills prescribed and STDs. He said that Birches Foundation would like to work more closely with the Substance Abuse Recovery Department. Mr. Odum said there is a big discrepancy in overdose and overdose death statistics reported by Birches Foundation, compared to what the County is reporting to the State.

Mollie Tompkins, a Patient Access Navigator with Mountain Valley Hospice and Palliative Care, said her business has experienced difficulties getting convalescent, non-emergency transports. She detailed the company's experiences and requested the service be restored.

Grant Welch provided the Board appreciation gifts and thanked them for their contribution to the Easter Brothers Mural in Mount Airy. He said the County's contribution helped the project get finished. Mr. Welch invited the Board to an upcoming church service featuring the music of Jeff and Sherry Easter.

Dr. Frank Beals said he disagreed with the Board's initial vote on banning Coca-Cola vending machines from Surry County Government facilities. He also said that he disagreed with recent comments and the Board's stance taken against school systems, regarding critical race theory. Dr. Beals said the Board was trying to censor Coca-Cola and school systems.

Chandler Beals read a prepared speech, which included comments from recent Board meetings and discussed lessons learned from Russia.

Chairman Marion closed the open forum.

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Johnny Easter, Development Services Director, presented a rezoning request from Teramore Development for 3348 Cook School Road, rezoning case #CZR1210 and a portion of parcel ID #6052. The development company wants to build a Dollar General at the location and requested to rezone the property from Rural Agricultural (RA) to Highway Business (HB). Mr. Easter described the area's low-to-medium density and said mixed use development already exists there. He said the Planning Board recommended approval of the request and the request is consistent with the Surry County Land Use Plan. Mr. Easter said no comments expressing opposition have been received from the public.

Chairman Marion opened the public hearing for the item.

Attorney Mike Fox, representing Teramore Development, and Daniel Almazan, who works in Teramore's land acquisition division, spoke in favor of the request. They said there was no opposition to the request.

Chairman Marion closed the public hearing.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to adopt the statement of consistency for the 3348 Cook School Road rezoning request.

Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Chairman Marion, the Board voted unanimously to approve the rezoning request from Teramore Development for 3348 Cook School Road, rezoning case #CZR1210 and a portion of parcel ID #6052, from Rural Agricultural (RA) to Highway Business (HB).

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Mr. Easter presented a request for a text amendment in the Surry County Code of Ordinances to include language about electronic gaming facilities and multipurpose event centers. He said that he spoke with County Attorney Ed Woltz and Sheriff's Office staff, both of whom said that wording was needed in the ordinances to regulate the electronic gaming facilities - wording prior to the text amendment request only covered arcades.

Mr. Easter explained what constitutes a multipurpose event center - he used White Sulphur Springs, which has a wedding venue and cabins, as an

example. He said a property classified as a multipurpose event center would feature similar amenities and some would offer RV hookups.

Chairman Marion opened the public hearing for the item.

J.T. Henson asked questions about the proposed text amendment. He said how is the public supposed to know what is being proposed for public hearings when they don't know about the public hearings and what language is included in the proposed text amendment? The Board said that the public hearing documents can be requested in advance since they are public information and that staff makes the documents available at Planning Board meetings, which can be attended by the public.

Paula Stanley said she is very opposed to electronic gaming operations and explained why. Chairman Marion and Mr. Easter told Ms. Stanley that the text amendment would better regulate current and future electronic gaming operations, that right now the County has no authority to regulate or enforce ordinances on these properties. Mr. Easter said that the text amendment would say that electronic gaming operations are not an arcade.

Commissioner Johnson asked Mr. Easter what White Sulphur Springs was classified as, and Mr. Easter said that the property went through a conditional rezoning. Mr. Easter said several sites currently want to offer glamping and that vineyards and wineries, which host weddings, fall under bonafide farm exemptions.

Chairman Marion closed the public hearing.

Responding to questions from the Board and County Manager Chris Knopf, Mr. Easter said that multi-purpose event centers are now allowable under conditional use permits. Board members expressed how they were not presently comfortable with a text amendment regulating multi-purpose event centers and would like to hear more information about that topic at a future meeting.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the text amendment in the Surry County Code of Ordinances to include language about electronic gaming facilities (but not language for a text amendment regulating multi-purpose event centers).

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Nikki Hull, with DSS, discussed two action items, including the Energy Assistance Outreach Program and the In-Home Aide Service Policy. Ms. Hull explained the need for each request and their purpose.

Upon motion of Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the 2021-2022 DSS plan for the Energy Assistance Outreach Program that is submitted to the State.

Upon motion of Chairman Marion, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the In-Home Aide Service Policy.

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Ms. Hull also noted a Child Support Shout-out recognition received by DSS employee Lisa Jackson for acquiring a substantial amount of child support arrears funding. She also included informational items about Adult Social Work Services regional supervision, a Partners Health Management school supplies/care package project, a Wesleyan Methodist Church luncheon recognizing Child Protective Services staff for their work and the August cancellation of DSS Board training from the UNC School of Government.

Terri Weddle, with DSS, updated the Board on economic benefits programs. She said that the State has decided to enroll case workers in a

certification program for NC FAST and that the County will have a staff member oversee the project. Ms. Weddle also updated the Board on the Recipient Eligibility Determination Audit (REDA), which is in the fourth month of the 10-month project. She said cases have been pulled for review and results have been good. Ms. Weddle said Medicaid transformation has been going well; the biggest problem has been with hospitals only signing up with two of the four insurance companies thus far. Staff has upcoming meetings with the local hospitals to resolve the problem.

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Jessica Montgomery, Public Works Director, requested the Board approve a contract for site and construction testing for the new Detention Center. She recommended the bid from Geo-Hydro for \$201,281.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Chairman Marion, the Board voted unanimously to approve the bid from Geo-Hydro for \$201,281 to provide site and construction testing for the new Detention Center.

Chairman Marion asked when bulldozers will start rolling on the new Detention Center project, to which Ms. Montgomery responded that the pre-construction meeting is Thursday, July 22.

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Penny Harrison, Tax Administrator, requested the Board change the current tax revaluation schedule from every five years to every four years, which is the schedule that other neighboring and nearby counties are following. If changed, the next revaluation would occur in 2025, instead of the current scheduled year of 2026.

Commissioners Tucker and Harris said it's good to stay on the four-year schedule with other nearby and neighboring counties.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the tax revaluation rescheduling to every four years.

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Ms. Harrison requested the Board approve property tax foreclosure sales that had been on hold during a one-year moratorium that was implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She said the foreclosure sales have been properly advertised in the Mount Airy News and Elkin Tribune and posted on the Surry County Government website.

Ms. Harrison detailed the extensive length of time that taxes were owed on the properties. She said numerous written notices were sent and personal contact was made with the owners to resolve the delinquent tax payment issues.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the property tax foreclosure sales on the following properties:

- 150 Bourbon Trail, Mount Airy
- 189 Village Main Trail, Mount Airy
- Parcel #590700923603, E. Piney Grove Road, Mount Airy
- 363 Grassy Creek Road, Pinnacle
- 144 Highland Drive, Mount Airy

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Ed Woltz, County Attorney, requested the Board approve a gymnasium construction and acquisition agreement and a revised resolution for the Elkin City Schools gymnasium. He detailed the need for the documents.

Upon motion of Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to approve an Elkin City Schools gymnasium construction and acquisition agreement and revised Resolution Approving and Authorizing Acceptance of Certain School Property from the Elkin City Schools Board of Education, Execution of Construction and Acquisition Agreement and Approval of Lease Agreement.

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Chris Knopf, County Manager, provided an update on the Limited Obligation Bonds sale for the Elkin City Schools gymnasium and Detention Center construction projects, which went very well. He said it was a great feeling to watch such a well-received bond sale. Commissioner Tucker said the bond sale was a phenomenal success.

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Mr. Knopf requested the Board approve an Earthquake Recovery Program Grant Agreement, with the total amount to be determined later and no matching funds needed from the County.

Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board approved the Earthquake Recovery Program Grant Agreement, with the total amount to be determined later and no matching funds needed from the County.

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Mr. Knopf requested the Board approve the 2022 State Holiday Schedule as the 2022 County Holiday Schedule.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to approve the 2022 State Holiday Schedule as the 2022 County Holiday Schedule.

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Mr. Knopf requested the Board approve probation and parole leases for 3,500 square feet of office space at 1218 State Street in Mount Airy and 800 square feet of space at 201 E. Kapp Street in Dobson. The lease would be at no cost between Surry County and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety (DPS).

Upon motion of Chairman Marion, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve probation and parole leases for 1218 State Street in Mount Airy and 201 E. Kapp Street in Dobson.

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Mr. Woltz requested the Board approve a gas rights agreement with Barnabas Investment Group for the gas facility at the Surry County Landfill. The facility powers 1,000 homes in Surry County, Ms. Montgomery said. Mr. Woltz said the agreement would extend the contractual term by five years.

Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to approve the gas rights agreement with Barnabas Investment Group, extending the contractual term through 2036.

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Mr. Knopf requested the Board approve enhanced litter program options, including utilizing Surry County inmates and hiring a third-party litter crew to collect trash on State secondary roads. The \$5 increase in the landfill household solid waste fee, which was approved in the FY22 budget, will cover the enhanced options.

Commissioner Tucker said he supports all the options. He said that litter is still a problem. Commissioner Tucker recapped his conversations with Rockingham County regarding inmate litter collection and requested that Chairman Marion setup a meeting with Sheriff Steve Hiatt on

implementing a similar program in Surry County. He and Commissioner Harris discussed how they spoke with Sheriff Hiatt about the potential inmate litter collection program prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commissioner Harris said he is in favor of the litter program options and encouraged staff to develop a secondary road schedule for roads that are not covered by the State litter program. He detailed the funding that would be allocated to each line item in Surry County's proposed enhanced litter program.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to approve the proposed enhanced litter program, including inmate collection for \$115,243, hiring a third-party litter crew to collect trash on State secondary roads for \$52,000, litter committee programs for \$15,000, enforcement for \$10,000 and sweeps weeks for \$7,500.

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Mr. Knopf requested the Board reappoint Dr. Michael Gentry to the Board of Health.

Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Goins, the Board voted unanimously to reappoint Dr. Michael Gentry to the Board of Health.

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Mr. Knopf requested that the Board appoint Linda Davis to the Dobson/Lowgap Central District and make Jay Yopp an ex-officio member on the Recreation Advisory Committee, creating three more vacancies on the committee following the death of Eddie Wilmoth.

Upon motion of Chairman Marion, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to appoint Linda Davis to the Dobson/Lowgap Central District and make Jay Yopp an ex-officio member on the Recreation Advisory Committee.

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Mr. Knopf informed the Board of Wanda Akers' resignation from the Community Advisory Committee.

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In General County Business, Commissioner Johnson discussed the great progress of the Altec natural gas line extension, known as Project Connect.

Commissioner Johnson said he thinks the Board needs to revisit a public nuisance ordinance to address issues on Galax Trail and Sherry Lane and near Turner Mountain. Commissioner Tucker said he did not like the initial drafts of the public nuisance ordinance and would be willing to review a revised version but would like ample time to review and research another draft. Commissioner Harris said he does not know how to get the word out about a public hearing on that topic and other topics, since the Mount Airy News has not been covering Board meetings. Mr. Woltz said public hearing notices are published in the Mount Airy News, but Mr. Harris said most people will not pay attention to the notices - it takes an article, Mr. Harris said, to promote the public hearings. Mr. Harris said one person's trash is another person's treasure, but he's willing to look at another public nuisance ordinance draft with an open mind.

Chairman Marion said he went to the Bunker Reunion that was attended by an ambassador from Thailand, who presented Surry County with a plaque that Chairman Marion displayed.

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Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to enter closed session to discuss items pursuant to G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (3) legal, pursuant to G.S. 143-318.11(a) (4) economic development and pursuant to G.S. 143-318.11(a) (6) personnel.

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The Board resumed regular business.

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Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to surplus the Westfield Community Center, Jones Resource Center and Graham Field (adjacent to the Jones Resource Center).

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Upon motion of Commissioner Goins, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:07 pm.

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Nathan Walls  
Clerk to the Board