

Ashe County

*150 Government Circle
Jefferson, NC 28640*



Meeting Minutes - Draft

Monday, November 6, 2023

9:00 AM

Commission Meeting Room

County Commission

Chairperson Todd McNeill

Vice Chair Chuck Olive

Commissioner William Sands

Commissioner Jerry D. Powers

Commissioner Mike Eldreth

BUSINESS SESSION**I. 9:00 AM - Meeting Called to Order at the Ashe County Courthouse**

Chairman McNeill called the November 6th, 2023 Regular Session Meeting to order at 9:00 am at the Ashe County Courthouse.

Present: 5 - Vice Chairman Chuck Olive, Chairperson Todd McNeill, Commissioner William Sands, Commissioner Jerry D. Powers and Commissioner Mike Eldreth

II. Pledge of Allegiance/Opening Prayer

Commissioner Eldreth led the Pledge of Allegiance and Commissioner Powers offered the opening Prayer.

III. Approval of Minutes

[MIN 23-31](#) October 16th, 2023 Regular Session Minutes

Attachments: [11-6-2023 October 16 2023 Meeting Minutes](#)

Commissioner Sands made the motion to approve the October 16th, 2023 Regular Session Minutes. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

IV. Adoption of Agenda

County Manager asked to move PRES 23-192 Health Department Bids to the end of the agenda. Commissioner Powers made the motion to adopt the agenda as amended. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Adopted

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

Adoption of Agenda**V. Public Comment**

Chairman McNeill opened the floor for Public Comment at 9:04 am. and closed the floor for Public Comment at 9:11 am. The following Ashe County citizens spoke:

Ashe County resident Tonya Robinson took the podium and spoke on the need for minimum housing standards in Ashe County. She stated that at the last commissioners meeting "Down Home North Carolina" addressed the Board about a housing standard and that there were some questions that were left open which she would like to address. First she said we were asked "who would benefit from having a housing standard that we knew?" Tonya then stated that the answer is simple, "everyone, everyone benefits from it. You have better physical health, better mental health, and better educational prospects for children as a result of a housing standard. Children would not have to worry about bullying in regard to their housing situation or worrying about the housing situation

themselves. That a person feel worthless, living in a home that's not properly maintained and again that's just the start of the byproduct of minimum housing standards. Tonya stated that she would also like to ask who do you know that benefits from denying citizens a minimum housing standard? There have been claims that you gentlemen (the Board) felt disrespected because of blame being laid at your feet but who should be held accountable? Are you not accountable to the citizens of Ashe County? People in Ashe County have heard the statements that everyone in this county is on welfare, drugs or alcohol. Also, a statement was made by the Board suggesting that renters are responsible for maintenance and repairs of homes they rent and have no ownership of. She stated that none of these statements help. But that Ashe County citizens expect elected leaders to represent them, and make decisions that will improve the quality of life, not deny them, dignity, and humanity by continuing to allow a slumlord to carry on unfettered housing. Tonya said it is your job to fix that with innovative, bold solutions, grab the bull by the horns or let someone who will do so have your seat. She then sat down.

Ashe County resident Nancy Weaver-Hoffman then took the podium and stated she understood that there was a question from the Board that was left unanswered and that was "how do minimum housing standards benefit you?" She stated that she had racked her brain for two weeks trying to figure out what in the world that meant and all she could come up with is this; "I'm a follower of Jesus, so I'm commanded to love my neighbor I'm commanded to do justice & to love and show mercy. She said Jesus made it very clear, and that every text she'd ever read said that we we're to take care of everyone among us, especially those who's voices are often unheard , to fight oppressive systems, to do all we can for the least of these, to love our neighbor, and he didn't make any exceptions on who our neighbors are. Nancy stated that working to get minimum housing standards in Ashe County benefits my soul. Secondly she stated, I'm an Odd Fellow, I took a oath 14 years ago to "Visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead and educate the orphan" and to work towards building a better world, and that not working towards decent minimum standards of living for all the residence of Ashe County would be a major violation of her oath. Third she stated, I am a human being and witnessing our neighbors living in dangerous and substandard housing hurts my heart, does it hurt yours? She then took her seat.

Ashe County resident Karen Gross then took the podium. She stated that she was here to support these wonderful people here today, Tonya Robinson, and Mary Beth Weaver. She stated that she had looked up some statistics from AARP and it appears there's no policy around housing in Ashe County. She said she thinks it would be wonderful since there's a strong citizen interest in the issue. Karen then stated that her parents came here to Ashe County in 1982. They were New Yorkers like her. She said this was an amazing place. That her parents had looked all over the country. They found a place here and then they just tucked them selves away in heaven.(Ashe County) Then they invited the family to come, so I'm here I'm part of their family and I am aware that there are issues and problems. She stated to the Board that she knows they deal with issues every day but it's not enough to just sit cozy in a chair. That you have to talk to your neighbors about how to solve the issues that are important to people who have less or lesser means. If the commissioners do not care about housing who is going to? She stated that these amazing ladies (Down Home NC) care and I support them. She stated she would support anyone that she thinks cares that is willing to do something to take a little step forward, so she would like to propose maybe getting together in a meeting with the commissioners, these two ladies and anyone else from Down Home or anyone interested in talking about policy. She said this is a three prong issue. You have the landlords, they want their profit and this will cost them money to improve their buildings. Two, you have the part of the community that's living in a pigpen and it's affecting their

health. And then you have us, who are the voice of democracy, we have the freedom to express ourselves and so we have these three elements and we want to come together and discuss about how maybe we could develop some policy or put some government funding into improving housing for our neighbors so they can be as happy as we are. We are blessed so why shouldn't we care about our neighbors? Karen stated "we're saying we do care and this is how we're trying to do it. Can we make changes so that we can help our neighbors have a better quality of life in Ashe County, so we can keep that wonderful reputation that Ashe County has for being a beautiful healthy clean area. Can we do that? Can I get your commitment to do that? To meet with some of the neighbors here in Ashe County and talk about developing a policy where we can address this issue of substandard housing? She said it is a concern to a lot of people and it should be a concern of our government officials too. She then took her seat.

No further public comments were offered.

VI. Presentations

PRES 23-188

9:05 AM - PUBLIC HEARING - Michelle Ball, Regional Planner, HCCOG) - Closeout of the 2020 Community Development Block Grant – Coronavirus Program (CDBG-CV) – the Ashe County Direct Utility Assistance Project.

Attachments: [11-6-2023 Public Hearing Notice \(CDBG-CV\)](#)
[11-6-2023 Ashe County CDBG-CV Grant 20-V-3509 Closeout](#)
[11-6-2023 NC Dept of Commerce \(REDD\) Small Cities CDBG Program Closeout Performance Rpt](#)

A Public Hearing was held and presented by Michelle Ball, Regional Planner, (HCCOG) for the closeout of the 2020 Community Development Block Grant – Coronavirus Program (CDBG-CV) – the Ashe County Direct Utility Assistance Project. Michelle stated that the purpose of this public hearing is to give the opportunity for citizen input concerning the closeout of the Ashe County's CDBG-Coronavirus project #20-V-3509 the Ashe County Direct Utility Assistance Project. The County was awarded \$900,000 in Community Development Block Grant-Coronavirus Funds (CDBG-CV) in December 2020 to provide assistance to low- and moderate-income residents within Ashe County affected by COVID-19. The County initially directed the funding to assist eligible households with utility payments including water, sewer, electricity, and gas. Eligible households, those with income under 80% of the county median household income (as determined by HUD) that were affected in some way by COVID-19 and were having problems paying their utility bills. The program could provide up to 6-months of assistance to each household. Approximately halfway through the project the County found not as many requests were coming in for assistance as was anticipated in the application. A reason for the overestimation in applicants may be due to the fact that at the same time the Ashe County CDBG-CV program received release of their funding, there were several other programs already in place to also assist with utility payments. In October 2021, the County asked for and was granted permission to use the CDBG-CV funding to assist with Rental and Mortgage Payments as well as help with internet service. The county received a few new applicants and helped some of the utility applicants with rent/mortgage payments. A total of 63 households, which included 202 individuals, were assisted through this program. On average, there was \$775.84 spent per household on utility assistance and \$3,977.01 on rental/mortgage assistance. Ashe County DSS was responsible for all of the day to day administration of the project including application intake and processing. High County COG was responsible for preparing the grant application, CDBG compliance, preparing reimbursements requests to the State and reporting.

Ashe County received \$900,00, spending a total of \$159,590.61 during the project including:

- \$79,142.08 for Public Services Activities (average of \$1,256.22 per household (or \$391.79 per individual).
- \$80,448.53, or 8.9% of the total grant award, was spent on planning and administration.

A little over 17% of the total funding was expended before the program ended. Unfortunately for the program (but fortunately for residents), the applications for assistance decreased over time as the pandemic waned; other agencies received Federal and State funding to provide the same services; and many households used their maximum 6-months assistance and could not apply again. Unexpended grant funds in the amount of \$740,409.39 will be deobligated (or returned to the NC Department of Commerce) to be used for other CDBG funded programs. This public hearing for reporting the project accomplishments is a requirement of the official closeout procedure. The final closeout documents are expected to be submitted to NC Dept of Commerce before December 15, 2023.

Commissioner Powers made the motion to approve acceptance of the closeout of the 2020 Community Development Block Grant – Coronavirus Program. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

- For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

[PRES](#)
[23-189](#)

9:07 AM - Chris Lambert, Tax Administrator - Monthly Tax Report, September 2023

Attachments: [11-6-2023 Monthly Tax Report](#)

Chris Lambert, Tax Administrator presented to the Board the Monthly Tax Report for September 2023. Vice Chairman Olive made the motion to approve the September 2023 Tax Report as presented. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

- For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

[PRES](#)
[23-194](#)

9:08 AM - Chris Lambert Tax Administrator - Untimely Homestead Exclusion (Elderly) 1-Request

Chris Lambert Tax Administrator presented to the Board an Untimely Homestead Exclusion Request. After some discussion Commissioner Powers made the motion to not accept the Untimely Homestead Exclusion Request. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

- For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

[PRES](#)
[23-190](#)

9:10 AM - Jessica Peele, A Safe Home for Everyone, Housing and Resource Advocate Partnership of Ashe - October 2023 Domestic

Violence Awareness Month Proclamation as proclaimed by Governor Roy Cooper.

Attachments: [Proclamation Domestic Violence Awareness Month 2023](#)

Virginia Bellanca presented and read the October 2023 Domestic Violence Awareness Month Proclamation as proclaimed by Governor Roy Cooper. Vice Chairman Olive made the motion to approve the proclamation for Ashe County. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

[PRES](#)
[23-191](#)

9:13 AM - Zack Shepherd, Community Relations Regional Director Vaya Health - Vaya Health Update

Attachments: [11-6-2023 Zack Shepherd Email Request](#)

Zack Shepherd, Community Relations Regional Director Vaya Health presented to the Board a Vaya Health Update which included a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation included updates on NCDHHS, Budget Provisions, Foster Care Recruitment and Comprehensive Clinical Assessment for Youth in Foster Care. The Board thanked him for the update and useful information.

No Action Taken

[PRES](#)
[23-195](#)

9:16 AM - Missy Parker, Veteran Service Officer - Resolution Supporting Operation Green Light For Veterans, the September 2023 Veteran's Report and announcement of the Veteran's Day celebration at Family Central

Attachments: [11-6-2023 Veterans Day Flyer](#)

[11-6-2023 Operation Green Light for Veterans Resolution](#)

[11-6-2023 Veterans Report September 2023](#)

Missy Parker, Veteran Service Officer updated the Board on the September 2023 Veteran's Report and made an announcement of the Veteran's Day celebration at Family Central which will be held November 11th, 2023 9:00 am - 1:00 pm. Missy invited Veteran's and their families to come out for a time of fellowship, light refreshments and goodies bags. Missy also presented to the Board for their approval the Resolution Supporting Operation Green Light For Veterans. Operation Green Light for Veterans encourages Ashe County citizens in patriotic tradition to recognize the importance of honoring all those who made immeasurable sacrifices to preserve freedom by displaying a green light in a window of their place of business or residence. Commissioner Powers made the motion to approve the Resolution Supporting Green Light for Veterans. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

[PRES](#)
[23-193](#)

9:20 AM - Adam Stumb, County Manager - Project Updates

Adam Stumb, County Manager presented the Board with Project Updates. Request for Proposals for the Salary Study have been submitted. Staff will review them and that will be brought before the Board at the November 20, 2023 meeting. Adam also gave an update on the DSS building and that he had worked previously with McGill on locating a new building. He said they are now exploring converting the AG Building to DSS if we proceed with the new AG offices. He also talked about a basic remodel in the courthouse with painting, carpeting and lighting. Also updating the aging HVAC System. Adam talked about the Big Laurel Stream Restoration saying that the NC Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ) awarded Ashe County and Resource Institute \$339,000 for 2,500 feet of stream bank restoration. Also, with the Landfill, Municipal Engineering has completed plans for cell 3.

No Action Taken

Other Items for Consideration

APP 23-7

Appointments to the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board for Keaton Craven, West Jefferson and Kaleb Davis, Lansing. These appointments were approved by the Advisory Board.

Attachments: [11-6-2023 Farmland Preservation Advisory Committee Applications for Nomination](#)

Commissioner Powers made the motion to approve the appointments for Keaton Craven, West Jefferson and Kaleb Davis, Lansing to the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passes with unanimous approval.

Appointment(s) Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

APP 23-10

Long Term CARE Joint Community Advisory Committee Re-Appointment of Mary Sexton

Attachments: [11-6-2023 LONG TERM CARE JOINT COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE Mary Sexton](#)

Commissioner Sands made the motion to approve the re-appointment of Mary Sexton to the Long Term CARE Joint Community Advisory Committee. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Appointment(s) Approved

APP 23-8

Adam Stumb, County Manager - Re-Appointment of Jury Commissioner David Boone of Ashe County.

Attachments: [11-6-2023 Appointment of Jury Commissioner](#)

In accordance with Chapter 9 of the General Statutes of North Carolina Commissioner Powers made the motion to appoint David Boone of Ashe County, to a two-year term as Jury Commissioner for Ashe County, North Carolina. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Appointment(s) Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

APP 23-9

Adam Stumb, County Manager - Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) Appointment

Adam Stumb, County Manager presented to the Board a Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) term vacancy. Chairman Todd McNeill's term on the High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO) Rural Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) is set to expire on December 31, 2023. Therefore, I would like to request an Ashe County Commissioner to fill Todd McNeill's vacancy on the RTAC or Commissioner McNeill can be reappointed. Vice Chairman Olive made the motion to re-appoint Chairman Todd McNeill to the RTAC. Commissioner Powers seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Appointment(s) Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

RES 23-4

Adam Stumb, County Manager - Resolution to Direct the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds (Re-write)

Attachments: [\(Re-write\) Resolution to Direct the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds](#)

A re-write was required on the previously approved Resolution to Direct the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds. Changes were made as required and a second approval was needed. Vice Chairman Olive made the motion to approve the re-write of the Resolution to Direct the Expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved as Amended

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

VII. Commissioner Comments**VIII. Announcements****IX. Executive Session**

Commissioner Powers made the motion to enter into Executive Session in the 2nd floor Conference Room at 10:45 AM. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Commissioner Powers made a motion that the Board return from Executive Session at 12:18 PM. Vice Chairman Olive seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

ES 23-16

G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6). Personnel

ES 23-17

G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (3) Attorney Consultations

PRES
23-192

Adam Stumb, County Manager - Health Department Bids

Adam Stumb, County Manager presented to the Board information on bids taken for repairs and construction at the Ashe County Health Department. After some discussion Vice Chairman Olive made the following motion in regard to the Ashe County Health Department to accept the bid from Phipps Construction for \$664,585.35. And also to waive any formalities for use of the incorrect bid form and that if Building Inspections requires replacement of wiring in the Health Department the county will allow up to \$30,000. Commissioner Powers seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

X. Adjournment

Commissioner Powers made the motion to adjourn the November 6th, 2023 Regular Session meeting at 12:19 AM. Commissioner Sands seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

Approved

For: 5 - Vice Chairman Olive, Chairperson McNeill, Commissioner Sands, Commissioner Powers and Commissioner Eldreth

Citizens with disabilities requiring special needs to access the services or public meetings of Ashe County Government should contact the County Manager's Office three days prior to the meeting by calling (336) 846-5501.