

Surry County Board of Commissioners  
Meeting of March 15, 2021

The Surry County Board of Commissioners met at 6:00 p.m., March 15, 2021. The meeting was held in the Board Room, Historic Courthouse, Dobson, N.C., virtually via Zoom and YouTube.

Board members present in-person for the meeting were Chairman Mark Marion, Commissioner Larry Johnson, Commissioner Eddie Harris and Commissioner Van Tucker. Vice-Chairman Bill Goins was not in attendance.

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

- Chris Knopf, County Manager
- Sandy Snow, Assistant County Manager
- Ed Woltz, County Attorney
- Jessica Montgomery, Public Works Director/Interim Facilities Director
- Don Mitchell, Jail Project Manager
- Martha Brintle, MIS Director
- Kristy Preston, DSS Director
- Susan Campbell, DSS Attorney
- Nathan Walls, Assistant to the County Manager
- Todd Tucker, Surry Economic Development Partnership President
- Mary Boyles, Shepherd's House Executive Director
- Victoria Putnam, Shepherd's House

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

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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 agenda.

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Chairman Marion requested the Board consider the minutes of the March 1, 2021 meeting as presented. Upon motion of Chairman Marion, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, 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 Johnson, seconded by Chairman Marion, 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 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$5,415.08.
  2. Total refunds for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$9,567.15.
  3. Total NCVTS tag and tax refunds for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$1,657.47.
  4. Total real and personal property discoveries for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$8,807.06.
  5. Total motor vehicle discoveries for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$0.
  6. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC additions for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$90,087.00.
  7. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC refunds for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$218.57.
  8. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC releases for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$1,195.40.

9. Total EMS, EMD and EMS-MC collections for the month ending 2/28/2021 in the amount of \$18,733.33.

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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.

Kevin Shinault said he appreciates what the Board does. He said he has been helping with elections since 2006 and supports Director Michella Huff. Mr. Shinault discussed Acorn and said it has morphed several times and is now called Black Lives Matter. He commended the Board for speaking against funding that was provided to the Board of Elections by agencies associated with Mark Zuckerberg and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Mr. Shinault said that EMS workers deserve hazard pay more than Elections employees.

Keith Senter commended Chairman Marion's efforts in assisting to find a resolution to the recent Hodges' DSS case. He said there have been delayed actions by County employees to improve the situation for the Hodges. Mr. Senter said he has proof that supports the Hodges' case and that the Board may be the only oversight over Surry DSS. He said that all media outlets will receive the information he shared tonight. Mr. Senter also requested that the Board send back funding provided to the Board of Elections by an agency associated with Mark Zuckerberg.

There being no further comments, Chairman Marion closed the open forum.

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Shepherd's House Executive Director Mary Boyles provided an update to the Board about Shepherd's House activities.

She discussed how her agency cuts costs for taxpayers, due to the homeless population's high use of public safety employees and hospitals. Ms. Boyles discussed how substance abuse problems have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ms. Boyles said the Shepherd's House graduated 86 percent of clients they served in 2019. In 2020, the success rate climbed to 89 percent. Those clients received job placement, rapid re-housing and affordable housing. She said some graduated clients now have cars.

Ms. Boyles said in recent years, 3,000 people have been turned away due to lack of space.

She discussed the food programs they offer their clients.

Ms. Boyles asked the Board to support the Shepherd's House.

She said a new building that is under construction will increase the number of beds from 18 to 48. Ms. Boyles said the facility will have classroom space for free GED programs and a kitchen for a culinary arts program.

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DSS Director Kristy Preston provided the Board a director's report and opened with a compliment to the Shepherd's House for their work.

Ms. Preston reviewed the Single County Audit finding and detailed an error that was caught, which has since been corrected and addressed through training. She said a line item in the upcoming budget or liability insurance should be considered to cover errors of this nature. Medicaid was also discussed.

She also reviewed a Medicaid Recipient Eligibility Determination Audit that is upcoming. Ms. Preston said that 20 Medicaid cases per month will be reviewed virtually.

She discussed a variety of training programs that are used for new employees.

Ms. Preston reviewed State-level legislative priorities, including Medicaid Eligibility Determination, the establishment of a federal accuracy rate threshold and advocating for State funding for Adult Protective Services.

She also discussed the NC Coalition on Aging's legislative priorities. Commissioner Harris said he was skeptical about supporting one of the legislative priorities that would allow nursing home staff to assist residents to vote. Ms. Preston said the item was just for information.

Ms. Preston commended the efforts of Child Support Case Worker Tiffany Crabb, who worked to acquire \$9,289 in arrears for a custodial parent.

She provided updates on child welfare, number of full-time employees, staffing shortages, a backpack program with local companies and a partnership with the local Children's Center of Northwest North Carolina facility.

Commissioner Harris asked Ms. Preston if she and her staff are working to rectify problems in the Hodges' case. She said the case needs to be discussed in closed session.

Chairman Marion and Ms. Preston discussed the department's great partnerships with local agencies.

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County Manager Chris Knopf previewed the Project Depot Builder public hearing, saying that the proposed funding is for extension of a natural gas line.

Chairman Marion opened the public hearing.

Surry Economic Development Partnership President Todd Tucker spoke in favor of the project. He said the \$150,000 in County appropriated funding would leverage \$540,000 from the State and \$480,000 from Frontier Natural Gas to build the natural gas line. The investment would create approximately 100 jobs in two years that have an average salary of over \$40,000 per year. Total investment for the project would be \$9.8 million.

Chairman Marion closed the public hearing.

Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Chairman Marion, the Board voted unanimously to allocate a \$150,000 match for Project Depot Builder and adopt the Project Depot Builder resolution.

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Mr. Knopf presented an easement request from Surry Communications, located on Parcel# 593300317675, near the Siloam recycling center. He said the proposed 50-by-50-foot easement is important for Surry Communications to provide fiber optic media to the Siloam area of Surry County.

County Attorney Ed Woltz said this would be a permanent easement.

Board members offered their input and reached a consensus agreement to bring the easement request, with a legal description of the easement, back at a future meeting.

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Mr. Knopf presented a new sub-tenant request from YVEDDI for the Jones Family Resource Center for the Equality in Action non-profit group.

Commissioner Harris, who is on the YVEDDI Board, said he was not familiar with the non-profit. He pointed to language and pictures in the provided documents that gave him cause for concern.

Commissioner Tucker said he wants the County to research the non-profit and the request further.

Commissioner Johnson and Chairman Marion agreed with the comments of Commissioner Harris and Commissioner Tucker.

The Board directed staff and Commissioner Harris to research further.

Mr. Knopf presented a conveyance request for the contents of a trailer that has been conveyed to Sake Kids Surry County. He reviewed the list of items to be conveyed.

Mr. Woltz said the County needs to quitclaim any ownership.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to convey the trailer contents and adopt the following associated resolution:

**Resolution Approving Conveyance of Personal Property to  
A Nonprofit Organization  
Pursuant to G.S. 160A-278**

WHEREAS, the County of Surry holds the contents of a 2003 Homesteader Enclosed Trailer, VIN#5HABV12133N025718, as described herein (Three Stanley rolling totes; one Dial-A-Belt training station; one Sandwich Board Entrance Sign; four Camp Chairs; five Rain Coats; one 10-foot Pop-Up Tent; one Trash Can; one 36-inch Reflective Operation Medicine Drop Sign; one 48-inch Reflective Orange Car Seat Clinic Traffic Only Sign; one Folding Tri-Pod Sign Stand; one Broom; one Hand Truck; two Manual Scales; two 5-foot Folding Tables; twelve 25-pound Sandbags; thirty-six 24-inch Non-Reflective Orange Traffic Cones; one Cooler, and five Bungee Cords; and

WHEREAS, the Board of County Commissioners conveyed the 2003 Homesteader Enclosed Trailer, VIN#5HABV12133N025718 at their December 7, 2020 meeting; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina General Statute § 160A-280 authorizes a county to convey personal property for nonmonetary consideration to a nonprofit corporation if the governing board deems the property to be surplus, obsolete, or unused; and

WHEREAS, the County of Surry has determined that the personal property described above is surplus, obsolete, or unused; and

WHEREAS, the County of Surry finds that the public will benefit from the conveyance of the property described above by enhancing the public safety resources available in Surry County.

THEREFORE, THE SURRY COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS RESOLVES THAT:

The Board Chairman of Surry is authorized to execute all documents necessary to convey the 2003 Homesteader Enclosed Trailer Contents to Safe Kids Surry County.

The consideration for the conveyance is enhancing the public safety resources in Surry County.

In accordance with the notice requirements of N.C.G.S. § 160A-280, public notice of this resolution was given by posting on the County of Surry, North Carolina website.

Mr. Knopf stated that the same trailer conveyed to Safe Kids Surry County either needs a paint job or paint wrap because the logo and letters showing Surry County's former ownership could not be removed or their outlines are still visible.

Mr. Woltz told the Board that the County is legally required to remove its name.

Commissioner Tucker requested a more judicious process going forward from County staff before conveying items with the County's name on it.

The Board discussed how spray painting the old Surry County logo and letters on the trailer would be more cost-effective than a wrap or paint job.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to adopt a policy that requires fiscal agreements between Surry County and new owners of conveyed County property on County logo and letter removal.

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Mr. Knopf presented an ambulance franchise renewal from Mountain Valley Hospice and Palliative Care.

Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to approve a one-year ambulance franchise renewal for Mountain Valley Hospice and Palliative Care, starting April 1, 2021.

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Assistant to the County Manager Nathan Walls presented a reappointment request from the Planning Board for Mark Johnson and Jon Tucker.

Upon motion of Commissioner Harris, seconded by Chairman Marion, the Board voted unanimously to recuse Commissioner Tucker, who asked to recuse himself because his son, Jon Tucker, was up for reappointment. Jon Tucker was appointed to the Planning Board before Commissioner Tucker was elected.

Upon motion of Commissioner Harris, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to reappoint Mark Johnson and Jon Tucker to the Planning Board.

Commissioner Tucker requested that Cory George be appointed to the Planning Board.

Upon motion of Commissioner Tucker, seconded by Commissioner Johnson, the Board voted unanimously to appoint Cory George to the Planning Board.

The Board discussed from which districts in Surry County two new Planning Board members would be approved. They requested addresses of current Planning Board members from Mr. Walls.

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Mr. Knopf presented a \$1,000 funding request for a planned Easter Brothers Mural in Mount Airy.

Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Chairman Marion, the Board voted unanimously to contribute \$1,000 to the Easter Brothers Mural.

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Mr. Knopf provided a litter program funding update. He said \$3,652.50 is remaining in the fund. He discussed the latest litter sign purchase and a future purchase that would decrease the fund to approximately \$2,200-\$2,300.

Commissioner Harris said he would like to see billboards promoting the program in the next year.

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Mr. Knopf requested action on the County's out-of-county travel ban that has been in place since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

Upon motion of Chairman Marion, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to lift the out-of-county travel ban.

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Mr. Knopf presented information on the American Rescue Plan Act, which includes allocations to local governments. He said that \$13.92 million is planned to be allocated to Surry County. Mr. Knopf covered the four possible uses for the funding, which include water, sewer and broadband projects; response to the negative economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; response to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 pandemic; and aid in reduction of County government revenue. He told the Board he believes that Surry County would be solely responsible for how the local funding is dispensed.

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In General County Business, Commissioner Johnson handed out documents, supplied information about what the State does for litter pickup and reviewed his ideas to improve litter pickup. He added community service as an option for collection efforts, among other ideas. He asked that staff promote the litter program's \$7 per bag payout in the newspaper.

Commissioner Harris discussed the Daniel Boone Heritage Trail document that was included in the agenda packet's information items. He described his appreciation for the Daniel Boone Heritage Trail and Daniel Boone himself. Commissioner Harris requested that the organization make a presentation at an upcoming TDA meeting. He also said he is proud that Surry County participates in the Civil War Trails program. Commissioner Harris voiced his frustration with current problems with illegal immigrants at the Mexican border.

Commissioner Tucker commended Commissioner Harris for his interview with One America News Network about Commissioner Harris' resolution regarding violations of First Amendment Rights by social media websites and Big Tech. Commissioner Harris thanked Mr. Walls and staff for their work on the project.

Chairman Marion said Vice Chairman Goins could not attend the meeting.

Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Tucker, the Board voted unanimously to enter closed session.

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The Board returned to open session and resumed regular business.

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Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to approve, but not release, March 1, 2021 closed session minutes.

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Upon motion of Commissioner Johnson, seconded by Commissioner Harris, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:55 p.m.

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Nathan Walls  
Clerk to the Board