Caldwell County
Lenoir, North Carolina

Board of Commissioners
January 7, 2019
6:00 p.m.

Present: Randy T. Church, Chairman
         Mike LaBrose, Vice Chairman
         Jeff Branch via teleconference
         Donnie Potter
         Robbie Wilkie

Absent: None

Staff Present: Stan Kiser, County Manager
              Kathy Greene, Clerk to the Board
              David Lackey, County Attorney

Chairman Church opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Public Comment

Julie Yount, a registered nurse with the Caldwell County Health Department, read the following statement:

“My name is Julie Yount and I am a public health RN with the Caldwell County Health Department.

I came from Caldwell Memorial to the health department in 2003. I have worked several months in the General Clinic and the remaining 15 years in Maternity which is my passion. I was called to work in Public Health. While I was able to care for many in our community at the hospital, I always felt there was a huge population that I was not in contact with. Many of you remember RN Shirley Stamey, our General Clinic Department Head who has passed. I remember during my interview many years ago she asked me repeatedly “Julie, what is public health to you?” And I repeatedly answered that I wanted to help those who needed and deserved quality care but could not afford it.” It took years in public health to realize the reason she continued to ask me the same question over and over. It is because public health is not just for those of us who are financially needy, public health is for each and everyone of us in Caldwell County. Anyone who may need their immunizations, a health or sports physical, medication if they are ever exposed to a meningitis epidemic or some other infection or disease. We are here to help prevent unplanned births, premature births, pregnancies that are high risk that could compromise the mother or unborn baby without early and ongoing prenatal care. We are here to treat STI’s in our community and to educate in order to decrease the chance of infections of any kind. To teach the importance of medication compliance, preventative measures such as coming in for pap smears, breast exams, blood pressure checks, lab work. As I and many others have done, we are here to show up in the night to staff a shelter to care for you or your family during a time of need when we are concerned and would rather be home taking care of our own children or grandchildren. But we come because we believe in a greater good than ourselves. We care. We are here on a Saturday morning on a
volunteer basis in order to give flu vaccines in hopes your mom, dad or child will not contract the potentially deadly flu. I could go on and on. We are here as a calling. We are here because we care and we truly want to make a difference.

But unfortunately public health nurses are a dying breed. Alarmingly for all of us there is a nursing shortage. The few new RN graduates are entering jobs at hospitals and home health agencies making **thousands** of dollars more a year than even our nurses here with 30 years' experience. For example, my daughter-in-law has been an RN for about 10 years. She is making about $7,000 more a year working 8-5 in home health than I am working public health. There is even a huge gap in pay between our average pay and other surrounding public health county agencies. There is no longer incentive to come to our county to work in our health department unless one wishes to come for a short time to put on their resume as public health experience while waiting for a job to open up in another county. As you know the cost of training new hires is not inexpensive by any means. Also the nurses who have been here for years are being left behind in pay while new hires come in at a pay barely less than we are making. In the past, experience and loyalty were considered assets and respected. I’m sure each of you have been made aware of the nursing shortages and turnover in our General Clinic especially in the past few years. Sometimes 3 nurses short, we have pulled together as clinics to help one another but over time there is no way to avoid the stress, risk of mistakes and low morale. We have seen even recently several applicants either come to interviews with good intent only to back out once they went back home and looked over their financial needs. Some have even accepted jobs then not shown up. Public health requires the most trainings and education of any facility I have ever worked. It takes years to gain the experience of learning several programs (which are constantly changing), having to learn the governmental guidelines associated with Medicaid. We have learned to adjust to managed care and new computer programs. In my prenatal clinic we have been very fortunate to see very little turnover in years and those were due to retirements. In Women’s Health we have at present 4 RN’s counting Cynthia Younce our Department Head. Between us we have 102 years of RN experience and 92 years of public health experience. It is to be expected that within several more years some of us will retire due to age and/or work years. Any prenatal nurse will tell you it takes at least one year to become even remotely comfortable and knowledgeable in this job. If the hiring trend continues as it is now I fear for our department as a whole and thus for our community.

Our Mission is to Prevent, Promote and Protect. From the tiniest newborn to the oldest member of Caldwell County. We are examiners, nurses, social workers, and administrative staff. We are also teachers, advocates, listeners, protectors, and examples to our community. I love public health. I have patients from 15 years ago who still come in to show me pictures of their children, ask for me by name because they know I truly care about them as do the other nurses I work with. I hope to see it continue forever but without reasonable compensation, even those who feel called eventually feel the need to provide for their families and will continue to move on. Today I am asking each one of you to at least consider a pay raise. Not just for us as employees, but to ensure that each and everyone of us in our county will have the opportunity to have quality, experienced care. We are here for you. If there is any way financially possible, will you please be here for us?
I thank you so much for your consideration. Good evening.”

Will Wakefield, DSS Director, thanked the Board for commissioning the pay plan study and said he appreciated their foresight to ensure Caldwell County is the best that it can be, noting that the men and women working for the county do so with a servant’s heart. He thanked them for being proactive in taking steps to attract and retain quality staff; and, recognizing employees for their great service.

Anna Martin, Health Department Interim Director, said she had seen two issues the County needed to address: 1) recruiting new employees and 2) retaining existing employees. She noted that there were times when new employees decided to leave the County even before coming to work on their first day. She thanked Commissioners for their time and consideration of the pay plan study.

Regular Session

Reverend Roger Beck, Pastor of Meadowbrook Baptist Church, provided the invocation and Commissioner Wilkie led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Church asked if there were any additions or amendments to the January 7, 2019 agenda. The Clerk requested the addition of a consent agenda item (#9E) to schedule a public hearing. Commissioner LaBrosse moved to approve the agenda as presented and amended by the Clerk. The vote was unanimous.

Quasi-Judicial Hearing re Conditional Use Permit Requested for MKM Farms, LLC Property

| Applicant: | Blue Ridge Electric, Jon Jacob (Energy Solutions Manager) |
| Property Owner: | MKM Farms, LLC |
| NCPIN: | 2881395616 |
| Location: | Off Hwy 18 |
| Site Conditions: | Open field & wooded; no floodplain at proposed site |
| Acreage: | 6.66 acres; 200’ x 140’ = 28,000 sq’ leased for 20 years (with five 2-year extensions allowed) |
| Zoning: | RA-20 |
| Elevation: | 1325’ |
| Surrounding Land Use: | RA-20 to the north, south, east & west |
| Request: | Conditional use permit |

The County Attorney shared the relevant portions of the County’s Zoning Ordinance pertaining to the request from Blue Ridge Electric Membership Corporation (BREMCO) for a conditional use permit (CUP) and asked the Clerk to swear in Ms. Stevens and Jon Jacob who would be providing testimony about the CUP application.

Shelley Stevens provided the above referenced information about BREMCO’s application for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for a .643-acre solar array that is comprised of 4 rows of 408 (total) panels to provide enough electricity to serve approximately 15 homes per year. The project is to be located on an approximately 6.66-acre lot off Highway 18/Wilkesboro Blvd, on property owned by MKM Farms, LLC. The PIN for the property is 2881395616. Already have a similar system near Patterson school and it is going well.
The site is located in an area identified in the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map as a strategic corridor that is designated as needing increased setbacks, increased lot widths, and vegetative buffers with new residential communities. This non-invasive, buffered use fits within the district perfectly. The site is not part of a projected commercial or industrial area. The proposed site is not in a Flood Hazard Area and is outside the Watershed Critical and Protected area, according to Caldwell County’s Geographic Information System.

Ms. Stevens shared a photo view of the site and noted that only one spot on the site was not buffered; however, it is not required. She said the solar array system would probably not be visible from Hwy 18. She also shared a layout image of the solar array system. Ms. Stevens noted the plan met all requirements of the County’s zoning ordinance and said the surrounding property owners were notified of the request and public hearing. It was noted that she and the Planning Board reviewed the Conditional Use Permit application with the Solar Energy System Zoning Ordinance requirements (Sections 40B.111 & 70C.) and it met all of the requirements of the Zoning Ordinance (contingent upon receipt of certain items) and fit in with uses proposed in that district by the Caldwell County Comprehensive Land Development Plan.

Ms. Stevens informed Commissioners that the Planning Board recommended approval of the conditional use permit.

Mr. Jacob, Energy Solutions Manager for Duke Energy, said the proposed solar array system would be similar to the one located in Patterson and three systems in other counties. He noted that Duke Energy had a wait list for members that are interested in having a solar array system in the future. He said they planned to build more as desired by the community.

The County Attorney highlighted the specific requirements for approving and issuing the conditional use permit. He said Ms. Stevens had advised all the requirements had been met.

Commissioner Potter moved to approve the conditional use permit as presented and described; and to approve the following order. The motion carried unanimously.

Public Hearing re Proposed Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance

Ms. Stevens presented Commissioners revised amendments to the Zoning Ordinance proposed by her and the Planning Board to address concerns expressed by Commissioners during their meeting on November 19th. Commissioners did not take action on the proposal at that time and requested a revision to allow for location of recreation vehicles in times of federally declared emergencies within Caldwell County. Ms. Stevens presented the following proposal.

Recreational vehicles:
Recreational vehicles are already only allowed as temporary uses in Caldwell County. The Planning Board recommends inserting the following provision under “Article VI, Applications of Regulations,” in order to specify how long someone may inhabit a recreational vehicle:

“Section ___ Recreational Vehicles
Per this ordinance, recreational vehicles are for temporary occupation (in districts in which they are allowed). No recreational vehicle (RV) may be inhabited continuously for more than six months without an active building permit. If the occupant(s) has an active building
permit for a home, they may inhabit the RV for one year. Three-month extensions are allowed with active building permits, up to a maximum of two years. If illegal activity within an inhabited RV is reported by a law enforcement agency, tenants may be forced to evacuate within 30 days. In the event of a Federal-, State- or County-declared emergency, an exception may be made for those required to occupy their RV’s. After submitting a request that is approved with the Emergency Management Department, people may occupy RV’s for up to two years.”

Chairman Church declared the public hearing open. There was no public participation; therefore, Chairman Church declared the public hearing closed.

Commissioner Branch questioned the difference in RV’s and “tiny” homes that were now popular. He said some RV’s were more expensive and nicer than a lot of homes. Ms. Stevens advised that tiny homes had to meet requirements of the County’s Zoning Ordinance as well.

Chairman Church questioned “park models” at campgrounds, etc. and how they would be affected by the new proposal.

Discussion followed comparing RV’s with tiny homes and granny pods. Ms. Stevens informed Commissioners that the State had a provision to allow “granny pods” for relatives to live near their families for health care reasons.

Commissioner Wilkie said he wanted better clarifying language in the proposal before felt action should be taken on the proposal.

No action was taken. Commissioners asked Ms. Stevens to send it back to the Planning Board for further clarification and consideration of individuals wishing to live permanently in an RV.

Implementation of the Employee Salary Adjustments Based on the Survey and Recommended by the MAPS Group

Human Resources Director Jimmy Harrison asked for the Board’s direction regarding implementation of the Classification/Pay Plan for Caldwell County employees as identified in the agenda.

Commissioner Wilkie moved to adopt the pay study by the MAPS group in its entirety as submitted by the MAPS Group.

Commissioner Branch asked what the cost to implement the plan would be and noted his concern that performance evaluations had not been done on employees. He said he did not want to give raises for certain employees based just on their job titles.

Commissioner Wilkie said he reviewed the report and said that Caldwell County was very far from and underneath employee compensation of surrounding local governments. He said he felt it was time to do something.

Commissioner Branch said Caldwell County was not doing a good job of evaluating employees’ performance and was concerned about the tax rate increase on the county’s 83,000 citizens to pay for implementation of the MAPS Group study.
Commissioner Wilkie compared Burke County with 543 employees to Caldwell County’s 553 and said he felt Commissioners were not going overboard with implementing the plan. He said an evaluation process would have to be implemented and said the pay plan would only bring Caldwell County up to what other counties paid. He cited the high costs of retraining new hires as well as the decreased work force when deputies were in training due to consistent turnover. Commissioner Wilkie said he used training of deputies as an example but said it happened in every department. He said, as a former employee, he was aware that people wanted to work in Caldwell County because that is where they lived and grew up but chose other counties because of the difference in compensation.

Commissioner Potter expressed concern about accountability as well. He said that, over the years, a culture had been created that has resulted in Caldwell County becoming a less chosen place to work. He said the additional funding needed to implement the plan, $2.8 million, was only getting employees up to the average and would not, by any means, get Caldwell County to the top of the pay scale. Commissioner Potter said it was due to prior commissioners who chose not to do anything. He asked department heads and employees to hold everyone accountable.

Commissioner Branch said he was in favor of merit based pay increases because it was a fairer system to compensate employees who were doing the best job.

Commissioner LaBrose said the County needed to implement a performance evaluation process/merit pay plan for employees. He said good county government and awesome employees have made it possible to implement the plan. He noted Caldwell County was doing well economically and department heads/employees were appreciated for the great job of saving the County money and for providing great service. Commissioner LaBrose said the County Finance Officer Tony Helton had assured him that implementation of the pay plan could be done because the County had been conservative enough in the past to be able to do it. He challenged the County Manager, Human Resources Director, and the Finance Officer to put in place a good merit system moving forward so that this would not have to be done again. He said the Commissioners had improved County equipment, making it a pleasure to work in Caldwell, i.e. new telephone systems, a new middle school and; hopefully, another new school. Commissioner LaBrose said the Board had been able to do a lot with little resources. He stated his support of implementing the plan and charged Mr. Kiser, Mr. Harrison, and Mr. Helton to develop a system moving forward that would be fair to all employees.

Commissioner Wilkie said they would not know the effect of implementing the pay plan on the budget at this time.

Commissioner Branch said the Finance Officer said it would require a three-cent tax rate increase. He said he wanted to compensate employees too but felt the County should “clean house” before they move forward with money for employees with certain job titles. He expressed great concern that performance evaluations were not done and there were no tools to compensate the best employees.

Commissioner Potter said Commissioners had to implement the salary study pay plan.
Chairman Church said the Board had burdened employees in the lack of compensation for the jobs that they do and said implementation of the plan would come with expectations that he felt sure employees would meet and exceed. He said those that did not would be left behind. Chairman Church said he felt Caldwell County had the “cream of the crop” and he wanted to reward them with fair compensation. He thanked employees for their concern and for showing up at the meeting to express their support.

Commissioner Wilkie said the last pay study was done in 2008 and was only partially implemented with nothing else done until 2012. He said since 2012, employees had only received COLA (cost of living adjustments) and it was time to correct that situation. He stated his support for the plan.

Following, the motion passed by majority vote with Commissioner Branch voting in opposition.

Finance Officer Tony Helton said they had been working on it and hoped that it could be done in time to include in employees’ January payroll.

DSS Adoptions Program Report

Kim Arnett, Program Administrator for Child Welfare, introduced employees: Melinda Price, Lawanda Knox, and Joy Grandy and said they would be spotlighting the department’s adoptions program and highlight its diligent efforts for the recruitment of families for the children in their custody when all other plans had not been successful or the court and the agency had deemed those plans not in those children’s best interest.

Ms. Price, Supervisor of Licensing Foster Care and Adoptions Program gave a brief synopsis of things they were doing to recruit adoptive families. She said they had used radio spots, advertised on a billboard in the southern end of the County that seemed to be a good location, library displays, partnered with the Baptist Association in the Safe Night Out event, and partnered with private agencies in efforts to recruit adoptive families for the children in foster care.

Ms. Knox, Adoption Social Worker, said she was fortunate to participate in the North American Council of Adoptable Children conference held in August in Minneapolis, Minnesota on to learn more about ways to find families for adoptable children. She also attended another conference in November 2018 and Caldwell County DSS sponsored the keynote speaker for that event.

Ms. Grandy, Adoption Social Worker, reported that the department had worked with and collaborated with a private agency, Seven Homes located in Greensboro. Ms. Grandy said she was working to find Anthony, an eleven year-old, that has been in foster care since June 2014. She said Anthony was legally free for adoption and he was recently featured on Wednesday’s Child with Eric Thomas on WBTV. Also, he was featured on Fox News and Ms. Grandy shared the video of him trying to find a forever family that wanted to take care of him. To inquire about Anthony or other children in need, people may call 1-888-365-Family or email Foreverfamily.org.
Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes
The County Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners approve the minutes of the December 3, 2018 meeting as presented.

2. Budget Amendments
The County Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners approve the following budget amendments.

   a. DSS (Energy Assistance Program Funds) $75,882.00
The following budget amendment is necessary to reflect additional federal funding to the County’s DSS for assistance to eligible low income families with heating expenses during the winter. These funds were received in November and brings the total of the program funding for FY2018-19 to $389,749. No new local funds are needed.

   Increase  10.5392.334623  Low Income Energy Assistance  $75,882.00
   Increase  10.5392.441150  Low Income Energy Assistance  $75,882.00

   b. Heath Department (Grant Funds) $18,000.00
The department was awarded a CLAS Standards Advancing Health Equity Grant in the amount of $18,000.00. The grant funding is to be used to help provide training and programs to increase cultural and linguistic competence through the adapt of the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Service (CLAS) in health care. The following budget amendment is necessary and no local funds are necessary.

   Increase  10.5110.310500  Admin/Health Support  $18,000.00
   Increase  10.5110.426000  Supplies  $6,000.00
   Increase  10.5110.431100  Mileage  $3,000.00
   Increase  10.5110.431200  Training  $3,000.00
   Increase  10.5110.444100  Contractual  $6,000.00

3. Revision to Health Department FY2018-2019 Fee Schedule
The County Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners approve the following revisions to the Health Department Fee Schedule for FY2018-19 as approved by the Health Board.

   • CPT Code 17110 (destruction of benign lesions)  $148.53
   • CPT Code 11200 (skin tag removal)  $192.00

4. Blue Ridge Community Action’s Application for a FY2019-20 Community Block Grant
It was noted that Blue Ridge Community Action (BRCA) Executive Director Mattie Patterson requested the Commissioners’ approval of BRCA’s application for NC Department of Health and Human Services Community Service Block Grant funding. BRCA developed a FY2019-20 grant request of $456,973.00 to assist 180 eligible low-income families in Caldwell, Burke, and Rutherford Counties. The assistance funded by the grant and provided by Blue Ridge Community Action includes:

   • case management to 40 low income families along with direct provision of services that result in job placement as well as increase family income; and,
   • education and referral services to 100 low income families to identify human service assistance programs that can provide services to them.
The breakdown of the grant funding per county is listed below:

- Caldwell County $170,213.00 68 families
- Burke County $152,280.00 75 families
- Rutherford County $134,480.00 44 families

The County Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners approve BRCA’s submittal of an application in the amount of $456,973 for a Community Service Block Grant from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

5. Schedule Public Hearing re Options for Borrowing to Construct a New Middle School in Granite Falls
The County Manager recommended the Board of Commissioners schedule a public hearing at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, February 4, 2019 to consider options for borrowing to construct a new middle school in Granite Falls.

Chairman Church moved to approve the five items on the consent agenda as presented and recommended by the County Manager. The vote was unanimous.

Appointments to Nursing Home Advisory Committee

The Clerk informed Commissioners that Ms. Christina Franklin, Regional Ombudsman, had submitted the applications from Vickie Gragg and Linda Watson for appointment to the Nursing Home Advisory Committee. It was noted that both applicants completed the required orientation and were certified by the State Ombudsman.

Commissioner LaBrose moved to appoint Vickie Gragg and Linda Watson to the Nursing Home Advisory Committee for an initial term of one-year. The motion carried unanimously.

Closed Session

Chairman Church moved to go into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(6) to discuss a personnel matter and the motion carried unanimously.

At 8:12 p.m., Commissioner LaBrose moved to go out of closed session into regular session and the motion carried unanimously.

There being no further business, Commissioner LaBrose moved to adjourn and, by unanimous vote, Chairman Church declared the meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.