

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE FOR
COOPERATIVE ACTION**

Commissioners' Meeting Room/Courtroom of the Historic Courthouse
Main Street Hendersonville, NC 28792

Tuesday July 18, 2023 at 3:00 PM

MINUTES

City of Hendersonville: Jennifer Hensley City Council Member; Debbie O'Neal Roundtree, City Council Member

Henderson County: Rebecca McCall, Chairman; John Mitchell, County Manager

Laurel Park: J. Cary O'Cain, Mayor

Village of Flat Rock: Nick Weedman, Mayor; Anne Coletta, Vice Mayor; Pat Christie, Town Administrator

Town of Fletcher: Preston Blakely, Mayor; Mark Biberdorf, Town Manager

Town of Mills River: Shannon Gonce, Mayor; Sandra Goode, Council Member

1. WELCOME

Mayor Blakely called the meeting to order.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Blakely led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None at this time.

4. CONSIDERATION OF AGENDA

Mayor Blakely asked for additions, or deletions to the agenda as presented seeing none do we have a motion to approve the agenda as presented?

Mayor Shannon Gonce stated so moved and it was seconded by Vice Mayor Anne Coletta

Motion carries all in favor

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - APRIL 18, 2023

Mayor Blakely asked if there was any corrections, additions or deletions to the minutes as presented? If none do we have a motion to approve the minutes as presented

Vice Mayor Anne Coletta stated so moved and seconded by Mayor Nick Weedman

Motion carries all in favor

6. POWERPOINT PRESENTATION/UPDATE FROM HARRY RISING, TAX ADMINISTRATOR FOR HENDERSON COUNTY.

Tax Administrator Harry Rising gave a brief power point presentation on tax Collection for the 2023 tax year.

He stated that the overall collection rate in Henderson County is 99.18% which is just slightly below last year which was 99.20 % I believe. He said that I am sure everyone would like to know how much money they are getting this year. However, I can't give you the final numbers yet because I do not have the figures for public utilities which will not be ready until the end of this month. You will be getting a complete report at the end of the month.

Our tax appeal rate is actually lower than anticipated. We anticipated between 4,500 and 5,000. We are actually below that at about 4,100 to 4,200. Most of the appeals are being addressed at an informal level. People come to our office and we compare notes and tell them how we got our numbers and we listen to what their concerns are. We should be done with the appeals by the end of August, September at the latest.

One of my objectives is to do a series of videos to help people understand the appeal process. I came here from the Board of Appeals and after seven years of listening to appeals I see issues with taxpayer knowledge.

Tax scrolls will be released on July 28 for your tax collectors and bills will go out on August 1st along with that you will get some updates with the revenue which we hope to include with the July 28th release.

Mayor Blakely asked for questions or comments and there were none at this time. He thanked Mr. Rising for his presentation.

7. PRESENTATION ON THE NATIONAL OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUND & HENDERSON COUNTY'S ADULT RECOVERY PROGRAM.

Jodi Grabowski Health system coordinator for Henderson County gave an update on the settlement funding that the county is going to receive.

She stated that initially the county was going to receive 9 million over 18 years and then with some initial lawsuits that came about it is now 16 million over 18 years. So, we are looking deeply into our Memorandum of Agreement with the state to make sure that we follow the guidelines for using the money as it was intended. When we learned that we were getting this money we reconvened the Substance Abuse task force that Commissioner Lapsley started back in 2017. This is a group of stakeholders from nonprofits, hospitals and Mahec that actually know what our needs are in the county. Dogwood Health Trust also offered some funds to the counties in our area to help with on the strategic planning with the settlement funds as well.

Note: Option A & B were mentioned in the presentation by no details were given for the minutes/record.

She then introduced Katie Varnadoc who is with the Real Academy to explain what the committee had been working on.

Katie Varnadoc stated as an independent contractor she reviewed local health assessment data and public data from Henderson County. From the information that she gathered she has put together a report to help fill the needs of Henderson County. She stated that several things that Henderson County does need is recovery court and recovery housing.

She then turned this back over to Jodi Grabowski.

Jodi Grabowski said that our next step is to finalize our strategic planning and then present it to the board of commissioners and there is a budget that goes with it on the different items that we are suggesting. I also want to mention that we have a substance abuse action team and if anyone is interested in joining they are more than welcome. The county has already hired someone to work with this program and they are also going to understand what is needed as far as recovery housing. When I mention recovery housing you probably think of the county building housing and we are not going to do that as we cannot afford it. We will be partnering with people who already do that type of work. Also, a big part of the program is providing treatment in and out of recovery as in the diversion program that we are going to be creating. So, does anybody have any questions?

Mayor Blakely: asked so the person we hired as experience with pre and post diversion.

Jodi Grabowski stated that we are still building that and the person we have hired has deep experience with the veteran courts. We also have a position open in the detention center to help us identify people that need help. We already have a deep commitment from our DA, Judge Justice and her staff, the public defender and the probation officers. The interdisciplinary team is going to work on creating a policy to get all this stuff underway.

Mayor Blakely: stated so are you looking at a housing first model? Or do you not know yet?

Jodi Grabowski: said that we are looking for people that already do transitional/recovery housing and maybe they have beds that we can contract for.

Vice Mayor Anne Coletta: asked about the 4 areas of support?
(no sound/voice microphone this is from my notes)

Jodi Grabowski: stated that the 4 areas are Prevention, Intervention, Recovery support and Treatment. Recovery support can look like helping a person get a job, find a place to live, get a driver's license or help with getting a GED. In help with prevention there is the Sheriff's program with the work the Hope Coalition does in the schools. Any other, questions or comments?

Commissioner McCall: mentioned the there is a really good interview with Jodi by Mike Morgan on the county website if you would like to share this with your councilmembers.

County Manager John Mitchell thanked other managers as we have been talking about this last week and some other things leading up to this. We are building this in real time and have likened this to a plane taking off. I look forward to your engagement and engagement with the municipalities where appropriate as we figure this out together.

Mayor Blakely said great as well all know the importance of this program as I was appointed to a task force by the governor and thank you all for doing this important work in our community and our law enforcement officers.

8. OLD BUSINESS

None

9. NEW BUSINESS

None

10. UPDATES

a. City of Hendersonville

Council Member Debbie Roundtree stated that we will have a back to school fest on August 26 at JH Sullivan park from 11:00-3:00 and everyone is welcome.

Council Member Jennifer Hensley stated that the City of Hendersonville is moving forward with their comp plan and starting interviews and community engagement with that. Church Street and King Street are on DOT's paving schedule starting this fall and moving into next year. We are also starting some meetings for our sustainability plan for the city of Hendersonville as well.

Commissioner Rebecca McCall asked when the new putt putt course will be ready?

Council Member Jennifer Hensley said that it would be open late October. Jerry wanted It open Apple Festival weekend but that is not going to happen.

Assistant City Manager Brian Pahle said that it would in fact be open late October and We will have some weekends and holiday openings. Once the VFW is completed it will be open year around. I would like to thank the county for their partnership on this on this project.

b. Village of Flat Rock

Mayor Nick Weedman stated as of May 18 the sheriff's department has agreed to resume animal control activities in Flat Rock. This is after about a 12-year hiatus. We had it from 1995 when we incorporated until about 2011 then it sort of fell by the wayside. Thank you to the county commissioners and the sheriff's office for agreeing to support that.

We have a major project going on in our park. There is a creek that goes right through the center of the park and we are going to have it restored to its original meandering to stop bank erosion. We received a grant of \$190,000 to support this and are currently looking for other grants to help with the cost. The project should start this fall and take less than a year to complete.

On the North Highland Lake road project, that is currently under construction and does not seem like a lot is going on right now is because of some erroneous information on where the water and sewer lines are located. They are trying to get that resolved to resume the work. Right now, they are replacing one of two culverts under the road and the road is totally closed right now.

We have a kudzu control project underway and are currently in the spraying process. We leave most of that up to the county because they have got a great kudzu control program.

Finally, we are at a 100% tax collection rate in Flat Rock with no delinquent property taxes.

c. Town of Laurel Park

Mayor O'Cain stated that right now we are working on our storm sewer and edge of roadway before we move on to our paving project. Austin Construction is working on the storm sewer and edge of roadways as well as our maintenance crews. This part should finish by October. We have an initial contract with Tarheel paving for 1.1 million and there will be an additional change order that will fall into fiscal year 23/ 24 and we are working on that. Two thirds of the work will be completed this fall with the remaining third being completed in the spring.

We also (like Flat Rock) have a stream restoration project going on. We did receive two grants that will pay for about 90% of the work. We did put a little participation money in there a well. This should be completed by the end of the summer of this year.

We just made an award for a new website. Our website is about 8 or 10 years old and we are trying to improve on that.

We are doing an invasive vine removal. We do not have that much Kudzu but we have a lot of English Ivy, Privet and Oriental bittersweet.

The Coats property on Hwy 64 sold to Ingles in June. They are currently doing surveying work right now. The property is 11 acres, there is some brownfield activity because of contaminated soil but, this will be part of the mitigation process. We are trying to keep in touch with them to see what is going on there.

We should be seeing Hwy 64 improvements going on in Laurel Park including the round -a- bout(s) as well.

d. Town of Fletcher

Mayor Blakely stated that the town adopted their 9.4 million budget for the new fiscal Year. We lowered our tax rate from 34 cents to a near revenue neutral rate of 28 cents. Our biggest capital purchase for the new budget year will be integrated body worn cameras and in-car camera system for the Police Department.

We received some good news recently regarding sound walls being included for a portion of the I-26 project going through Fletcher. Sound walls were originally not included along the Wildwood community but this was re-evaluated by DOT. We are hoping the finishing touches to be put on this for a fall construction date. Thank you to DOT, Chuck McGrady, Representative Balkcom, and Senator Moffitt for their help on this.

The Town council passed a moratorium on cryptocurrency mining in June and then adopted regulations at the July meeting effectively banning this type of operation in Fletcher. The concerns were potential noise and excessive power consumption associated with this type of activity.

The town has started construction on a multi-use court project that will include basketball, tennis and pickleball courts. Completion is expected later in August.

e. Henderson County

Commissioner Rebecca McCall stated that the county approved their budget of 190 Million and lowered the tax rate by 13 cents to revenue neutral. Thank to our staff there was obviously a lot of work that went into that.

We are going to have our groundbreaking on the VFW and the renovations will start very soon. The completion date is set for July 4, 2024

We have received close to 50 million dollars in additional funding for the Ecusta Trail. A large portion of that will go to complete the Transylvania county side. This will just give us money to do whatever needs to be done to the bridge going over the French Broad river. The engineering part has started and we are going to start pouring pavement soon. One of the delays in starting construction was all the little bridges going over all the creeks.

We added to our East Flat Rock park 13/14 acres. It is a very beautiful piece of wooded property that sort of attaches to the back section behind the soccer field. We are looking at putting some disc golf in there and a walking trail and not sure what else. The family approached us to sell and it was just something that we could not turn down. I am very excited about adding to this little park as I went to elementary school at East Flat Rock so it is near and dear to my heart.

As I mentioned Mike Morgan our Chief Communications Officer did a video interview with Jodi and there are a lot of other interesting videos on the website as we are trying to get information out to the people. I discussed this recently at a DSS board meeting. We have added a lot of informational videos to our website so I encourage everyone to watch these.

I want to suggest that at the next meeting we have an update on the great grant and invite Optimum to share what their plans are.

At our last meeting I did an update on my task force for disconnected youth. After this I made a presentation to the school board and they immediately responded with the purchase of nine vans which will be used by four middle schools and five high schools for students who want to participate in after school events. So, I am hoping that we will see an increase in school event activities. As you know, when you get kids involved in activities their grades improve and they less likely to use drugs and stay in school longer. I am very excited about this and want to say thank you to the school board.

f. Town of Mills River

Mayor Shannon Gonce stated that we are in the process of purchasing 70 acres of land to the west side of our town hall. It is in farm use now and that farmer will harvest the crop off this fall and be in the process of removing the cattle and equipment off of it. We have been after it for several years to keep apartments from being built on it. I think 70 acres is a lot of land. I can't tell you right now what we might do with it but 100 years from now everyone will look at us like we were either crazy or geniuses for buying it.

Council Member Sandra Goode stated the we have had two employees added to our staff. One is a new afternoon park ranger and the other is a Parks & Recreation program coordinator and her name is Michelle Simpson and she has jumped in with both feet running. Our new ranger is Paul Hopper.

We just finished the grand opening of a Blue Ridge Snorkel trail and we have 69 people participate which is really good. They showed videos of them going up and things they saw in the river. It was very educational and I think they are going to make that a yearly thing.

During the month of July, we have been hosting Picnic with Professionals every Wednesday and the first Wednesday in August. The first Wednesday they had Mills River Fire and Rescue. I think this Wednesday is Henderson County Sherriff's office and the following Wednesday is Mills River Farm. Then there is a construction company. So, you pack a picnic lunch and bring the kids and it makes them more comfortable and knowledgeable.

We are bringing back something that I am very excited about and that is the movie in the park. We will have Top Gun Maverick on August 26th, Guardians of the Galaxy on September 30 and Ghostbusters on October 14.

Following the Guardians of the Galaxy they are going to have camping in the park. People can come and bring their tents and they will have fire rings and smores will be served as well. We have a lot of people signing up for this.

We have been doing a refit dance class that has been being offered every Thursday morning at 9:30 and it has been so popular that we will be offering this Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9:00 am. Residents can participate for 5.00 a person and non-residents are 6.00 a person.

11. REMINDER OF NEXT MEETING - October 17, 2023 hosted by Henderson County

Mayor Blakely reminded everyone that the next meeting will be Tuesday October 17 and will be hosted by the county.

12. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 3:44 p.m.

Approved on October 17, 2023



**Christine Thompson, MMC , NCCMC
Town Clerk**



**Mayor Preston Blakely
Town of Fletcher**