

MINUTES
WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
May 2, 2023

The Wilkes County Board of Commissioners met on Tuesday, May 2, 2023 at 5:01 P.M. with the following members present: Chairman Keith Elmore, Vice Chairman Stoney Greene, Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson, Commissioner Bill Sexton and Commissioner Greg Minton.

Also present for the meeting were Tony Triplett, County Attorney; John Yates, County Manager; and Sarah Call, Clerk to the Board.

Chairman Keith Elmore welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at this time.

INVOCATION – Vice Chairman Stoney Greene led the Invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Chairman Keith Elmore led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Motion was made by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene, seconded by Commissioner Bill Sexton and unanimously adopted to approve the Minutes of the Board Meeting held on April 18, 2023.

BUDGET AMENDMENTS/TRANSFERS – Motion was made by Commissioner Greg Minton to approve Budget Amendment No. 30 (Health Dept. Programs – Wilkes Health received \$2,500 from UNC Chapel Hill. These funds will be used for travel. No county money involved. Wilkes Health Food and Lodging program received \$8,266 from the state. These funds will be used to purchase supplies for Food & Lodging inspections in Wilkes County. No county money involved. Wilkes Health must replace an HVAC unit at a cost of \$22,452. The current unit is 25 years old and cannot be repaired. Wilkes Health will use COVID funds credited to General Salaries to purchase this unit. No county funds involved). The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene and unanimously approved.

WILKES COUNTY LITTER COMMITTEE POSTER CONTEST WINNER – Chairman Elmore recognized Anderia Byrd, Solid Waste Director and Madison Wood, Solid Waste Enforcement Officer. Ms. Byrd thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Wilkes County Litter Committee. The Committee includes local and state officials along with volunteers from Clean-Up Wilkes, County Commissioners and members from the School system. Their focus revolves around promoting the importance of litter prevention in the County, resulting in a less polluted environment and increasing the aesthetic value for all. She added recently the Committee held a Litter Poster Contest in conjunction with Earth Day for all 4th grade students in Wilkes County. Ms. Byrd said 6 schools and 91 fourth grade students participated and they are pleased to present a certificate to the poster contest winner, Lily Stanley from CB Eller Elementary School. Ms. Stanley won a pizza party for her class and all poster contest participants will receive an originally designed T-shirt from the Wilkes County Litter Committee. Ms. Byrd added the North Wilkesboro Speedway sponsored all T-shirts for the participants this year.

Chairman Elmore, the Board of Commissioners, Ms. Byrd and Ms. Wood recognized and congratulated Ms. Lily Stanley on winning the litter poster contest at this time. Chairman Elmore thanked the Litter Committee and Commissioner Johnson for getting the kids involved in this important endeavor.

RESOLUTION – RECOGNIZING SPECIAL OLYMPICS IN WILKES COUNTY – Chairman Elmore asked Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson to present this item. Commissioner Johnson thanked the audiences and all the Special Olympic Athletes for being here tonight. He thanked Chairman Elmore and Vice Chairman Greene for putting this in the Agenda. Commissioner Johnson stated Wilkes County Special Olympics will take place on May 12th at East Wilkes High School. He added as a teacher and former Special Olympics Coach for roller skating and basketball, he realizes the importance and significance of the Special Olympics program across the world and especially in Wilkes County. They want to recognize the Special Olympics Athletes and thank Ms. Susan Allen for her many years of service to the Special Olympics program. Commissioner Johnson read the Resolution and invited all the Athletes to join the Board at this time.

Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson made a motion to adopt the Resolution Recognizing Special Olympics in Wilkes County as presented at tonight’s meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bill Sexton and unanimously approved.

RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING SPECIAL OLYMPICS WILKES COUNTY

WHEREAS, May 12, 2023, is the day of the annual Special Olympics Wilkes County Games, which will be hosted at East Wilkes High School for more than 300 Wilkes County athletes; and

WHEREAS, 2023 marks the 55th anniversary of the global Special Olympics movement; and

WHEREAS, Special Olympics has become a catalyst for change and a force for social justice that uses sports, health, and education to empower people with and without intellectual disabilities around the world; and

WHEREAS, Special Olympics has nearly 40,000 registered athletes in North Carolina and more than 5.5 million in 170 countries for which it provides continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience joy and friendship; and

WHEREAS, Special Olympics builds communities of understanding, inclusion, and respect, believing that when people “Play Unified” they “Live Unified”; and

WHEREAS, Special Olympics goal for the next 50 years is to end discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Special Olympics is calling for people around the world to commit to making their communities more inclusive by supporting Special Olympics;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners hereby proclaims its support of the Special Olympics and congratulates all the athletes who will compete in 2023.

Approved by the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners of the County of Wilkes, the 2nd day of May, 2023.

*Gideon Keith Elmore,
Chairman of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners*

ATTEST: _____

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

WILKES COUNTY GOVERNMENTAL COMPLEX – PHASE TWO PRECONSTRUCTION AMENDMENT TO PRELIMINARY AGREEMENT FOR DESIGN-BUILD – Chairman Elmore recognized County Attorney Tony Triplett. Mr. Triplett said Kris Little with Vannoy Construction is here tonight if they Board has questions for him. He stated before the Board tonight is an Amendment to the Preliminary Agreement. In July 2021 the County entered into a Design-Build Agreement with Vannoy & Sons Construction for the Wilkes County Governmental Complex, for a three phased project. Phase One is the Emergency Services Center which is already designed, and currently under construction. Mr. Triplett said there are several EMS representatives here tonight, which is wonderful, and they have been heavily involved in that part of the project, which is Phase one. He added Phase Two under the contract with Vannoy was a new County Office Building and Phase Three was a combined Health Department and DSS Building.

Mr. Triplett stated before the Board tonight for consideration is whether or not they want to proceed with Phase Two, the 2021 contract called for an amendment to be entered into between the County and Vannoy, if and when the County wanted to proceed with another phase. Under the current contract, Phase Two is the next phase, which is the County Office Building. If the Board wishes to proceed, the Amendment before the Board tonight is what needs to be approved. He added should the Board approve this, the County and Vannoy would begin the design for Phase Two, the cost of the design is set forth in the Amendment which states: Part A – Programming, Conceptual, Schematic Design \$409,098.00; Part B – Construction Documents \$349,230.00; Part C – GMP Procurement \$239,472.00. The time frame is from present until March 15, 2024, this is what is included in the Amendment in order to proceed with the design of the County Office Building. This is a summary of where they are and what is before the Board.

Chairman Elmore asked why Phase Three in the contract says possible. Mr. Triplett replied that is because at the time it was approved in 2021 there was no definitive plan for a DSS/Health Department Building. That was conceptualized as Phase Three and was to be fleshed out if and when the Board decided to proceed with another amendment to the Preliminary Agreement. That would authorize Vannoy to proceed with the design of Phase Three DSS/Health complex, those decisions had not been made at that time. There was more to discuss such as would it be one complex or two, where it would be located, that had not been decided in 2021 and these reasons are why it said possibly. The County Office was more concrete at the time they entered into the Design-Build Contract. He added that, with Vannoy’s consent, the Board can alter the contract and change the order of the phases anyway they would like, this is always an option.

Commissioner Johnson asked about the design grant. Mr. Yates replied they received a SCIF grant of \$326,000 that can be applied to the design cost. Chairman Elmore asked why they are

not addressing the need at DSS and the Health Department, there is a need, and he was on the Board in 2021. The problem is, their priorities are out of order, he is in favor of putting forward both plans at this time, if the Board is willing. It is very important, they have 11 offices out of compliance at DSS; they are hiring 7 more for Medicaid expansion; those buildings are a lot older. This building was built for a County Office Building, he and Vice Chairman Greene went through it, it is very functional and a very nice facility. He is not opposed to building a new County Office, but he thinks they are missing addressing the need and this is a problem. They have 200 folks in those two buildings that serve a lot of clients and these clients generally can't be here speaking up for themselves. Chairman Elmore proposed for the Board to proceed and give consent to move forward with plans for both facilities, if they want to just build one, that is fine. He added he feels strongly in 8 years they will be struggling with building a facility to replace that one and they will never do it any cheaper than now. Chairman Elmore said he wants folks to know why when he votes that he is not voting against a County Office Building, he is voting because this is his gut feeling and he has been doing this for 19 years. They had a plan to build a new DSS in 2004-05 and put it off, and built an addition and said they would build it in 2015, now it's 2023. That need was then, this is now, and this is his problem and he hopes that he has explained his position well enough for all to understand. Chairman Elmore said this is a good Board and he respects all of them and sometimes they just don't agree, and they may not agree on priorities at this time.

Commissioner Sexton stated they have discussed this many times, he agrees there is a need at the other facilities, but he has an issue with spending that amount of money to design both when they may not build it, even in five years. Things change in that amount of time, equipment, technology, and costs. He is in favor of coming back in a year or two and designing the second facility. He added this was voted on before he and Vice Chairman Greene got here, two years ago, it looks like a good plan, and he is in favor of keeping the plan like it is. Commissioner Sexton said he respects everyone on this Board and their thoughts and comments, but like Chairman Elmore said, sometimes they just have a difference in opinion and he thinks they need to keep the plan as is and sees no reason to change.

Vice Chairman Greene said it is his understanding that the numbers they have seen to move into Phase two for the design are already in the 2022-23 Budget at this time. Mr. Yates replied yes. Vice Chairman Greene said they can move forward on this with no burden to the taxpayers and build this building with no concerns of having to raise taxes, or worry about growth or lack of growth, and move forward now. He added once they get that facility in place, they can look at the DSS/Health down the road. They would know where the County is and where the economy is at that time, because they can't predict the future. He added they need to be conservative on this matter and move forward one step at a time.

Commissioner Johnson stated he appreciates everything that has been said and working with a Board having these conversations where everyone respects one another's opinion. He added as Chairman Elmore and others have said, they have many facilities that are out of date; the County Office, Health Department, DSS, and they also many schools that are out of date and have many needs within the school system. They have been fortunate and made some updates with Covid money at the Health Dept. and the Curtis Bridge Road facility for DSS, which is a very nice

facility. He added he would love to do both plans, but is concerned about how things are going to change in a few years, will they get to use those plans or have to go back to square one. Commissioner Johnson said one step at a time is where he is at, they see the needs and would love to have new facilities in all areas, but at this time they need to stick with the original phased plan they already established in 2021.

Commissioner Minton said he will second the Chairman's comment that the combined DSS/Heath is worthier than a County Office at this time. He doesn't know what happened several years ago, but he is very familiar with DSS and the Health Department and the community they serve. They are here to speak on their behalf and he would be remiss if he did not put their needs above the rest. Chairman Elmore stated this involves planning by Vannoy and they saw numbers of \$20 million for a County Office serving 65 people and 60,000 sq. ft. He would caution them, this seems extreme and he is hoping that was just a rough estimate, he does not see how anyone can vote for this, it is way too much. He hopes these numbers can be trimmed during the planning stage. Mr. Triplett added the way the contract is set up, all they would be voting on tonight is the design. Then, should a satisfactory design for a new County Office Building be presented by Vannoy, they will vote again. At that time, they would vote on a construction contract with Vannoy for a new County Office Building and it will have a Guaranteed Maximum Price. Chairman Elmore said this is for planning only to arrive at the GMP number, Vannoy has done a great job for Wilkes County and they appreciate all they do.

Commissioner Bill Sexton made a motion to approve the Phase Two Preconstruction Amendment to the Preliminary Agreement for Design-Build between Wilkes County and Vannoy & Sons Construction Company, Inc. for the construction of the Wilkes County Office Building as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene. Voting on the motion:

Ayes: Vice Chairman Stoney Greene
Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson
Commissioner Bill Sexton

Nays: Chairman Keith Elmore
Commissioner Greg Minton

PLANNING DEPARTMENT – ROAD NAME REQUEST – MILL FALLS ROAD – REDDIES RIVER TOWNSHIP – Chairman Elmore recognized W.C. Scroggs, Planning Director. Mr. Scroggs stated the Wilkes County Planning Department has received a petition to name a private drive off Huffman River Lane (SR 1345) in the Reddies River Township of Wilkes County. The name chosen by Petition is Mill Falls Road. The request meets the requirements of the Wilkes County Road Naming Ordinance. Mr. Scroggs said pursuant to the Wilkes County Road Naming Ordinance, a Public Hearing was held to receive public input on the proposed Road Name Request for Mill Falls Road on February 21, 2023 and the ten-day notification period has been met, it is for the Board's consideration.

Commissioner Greg Minton made a motion to approve the Road Name Request for Mill Falls Road as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

WILKES COUNTY INSPECTIONS DEPARTMENT – 2023 FIREWORKS PERMIT APPLICATIONS – APPROVAL – Chairman Elmore welcomed and recognized Jacob Patrick Inspections Director and Niki Hamby Fire Inspector. Mr. Hamby stated he is asking for approval of two Fireworks Displays which are: North Wilkesboro Speedway five nights from May 16, 2023 through May 21, 2023; and Town of North Wilkesboro at Memorial Park on May 18, 2023. The applications meet the requirements of the 2010 Pyrotechnics Act and the County requirements, they have the appropriate Certificates of Insurance and everything is in order. He added by statute the local Board of County Commissioners must approve these events, which they are recommending.

Vice Chairman Stoney Greene made a motion to approve the 2023 Fireworks Display Permit Applications for North Wilkesboro Speedway and Town of North Wilkesboro at Memorial Park as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bill Sexton and unanimously approved.

CENTURY LINK/LUMEN/BRIGHTSPEED – APPROVAL – NC GREAT GRANT AGREEMENT – Chairman Elmore recognized Brooke Felts, Assistant County Attorney. Ms. Felts said for the Board's consideration this evening is the official Grant Agreement provided by the NC Department of IT, they have volunteered to spearhead all of the Broadband projects across the state. She added a year ago the County agreed to match Brightspeed with \$50,000 if they were awarded a Great Grant under the State's ARPA funds, and they were. She added they will serve 134 previously unserved locations with broadband service; the County is only responsible if they complete the project and would pay at the end. Ms. Felts said the State will handle all the reporting on this for them. Chairman Elmore said the GREAT Grant program will be continuing for years. Ms. Felts replied yes, they will have 2-years from when they initiate the project to complete it, everything has to be completed by the ARPA deadline of December 31, 2026. There are more waves of this funding, so potentially Wilkes Communications, which they also agreed to match, may get funding in the second wave, but this is yet to be determined.

Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson made a motion to approve the NC GREAT Grant Agreement between North Carolina Department of Information Technology, Wilkes County, and Connect Holding II LLC for a \$50,000 Grant Match; and give County Manager John Yates the authority to sign the Grant Agreement as presented at tonight's meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Greg Minton and unanimously approved.

TO: Wilkes County Board of Commissioners
FROM: John C. Yates, County Manager
SUBJECT: Recommended Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Annual Budget

DATE: May 2, 2023

The recommended budget for fiscal year 2023-2024 is respectfully submitted with a proposed tax rate of 66 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation. The total recommended budget including all funds: General, 911, Grants, Airport, Landfill, and Volunteer Fire Districts is \$115,274,379.

GENERAL FUND

The recommended General Fund budget for fiscal year 2023-2024 is \$99,709,501. This is a 2.27% increase from the 2022-2023 amended budget of \$97,537,055.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

This year's recommended appropriation for Wilkes County School System is \$20,623,712. This appropriation includes \$14,908,718 for current expense/operations and \$695,250 for capital outlay/improvements. This appropriation reflects a 3% increase in operation funding for a total of \$1,160,593. The total appropriation also includes lottery and sales tax funds forwarded to the School System by statute. We are estimating growth of sales tax funds we forward to the Wilkes County School System to be an additional \$129,231 for their portion of articles 40 and 42.

WILKES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This year's recommended appropriation for Wilkes Community College is \$4,259,453. The recommended budget for current expense is \$3,693,453; \$200,000 for capital outlay, and \$366,000 for salary supplements. This year's appropriation reflects a 3% increase in operation funding for a total of \$44,424.

APPALACHIAN REGIONAL LIBRARY

This year's recommended appropriation for Wilkes County Appalachian Regional Library is \$709,358. Plus, an additional \$34,160 for the Traphill Branch. This year's appropriation reflects a 3% increase for a total of \$22,253.

PERSONNEL

In the proposed budget for 2023-2024, we have the following new full-time positions:

2 – Sheriff – SRO's. Sheriff Shew is requesting two new School Resource Officer positions to be placed at Millers Creek Elementary, which has 733 students and Mulberry Elementary, which has 425 students. The Sheriff said both schools have a higher than average call volume and need for an SRO. These two additional positions would allow for an SRO dedicated to each of these elementary schools.

4 – EMS – Paramedics. This will provide staff for an Ambulance crew during peak times, 11:00AM – 11:00PM. This is needed due to the unavailability of Paramedic level Ambulance backup normally provided by Wilkes Rescue during peak calls.

7 – DSS – These seven additional Income Maintenance workers are needed for Medicaid expansion. The new positions are coded with 75% reimbursement in revenues and could improve with State funding.

PAY

In the 23-24 budget, we continue to make our employee's a priority. We are facing the same challenges with recruitment and retention that all government and private sectors are facing. Therefore, a 5% salary increase has been recommended for all full-time employees; currently we have 29 open positions in Wilkes County.

HEALTH INSURANCE FOR EMPLOYEES

Our self-insured Blue Cross Blue Shield Employee Health Insurance premiums will increase by 15% for 2023-2024.

HUMAN SERVICES

The Social Services General Administrative budget is recommended at \$9,805,379, this is a \$1,090,672 increase from the prior year. The total Department of Social Services budget is \$16,493,758. The County portion of the total Department of Social Services budget is \$7,285,191 or 44.16%.

The General Health budget is recommended at \$2,664,589. The total Health budget is \$7,989,776. The County's portion of the total Health Department budget is \$2,322,072 or 29.06%.

The VAYA Health budget is recommended an appropriation of \$218,612 which is the same as last year's budget.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Sheriff's Department recommended budget is \$8,451,619.

The Jail recommended budget is \$4,902,259.

The Emergency Communications recommended budget is \$1,824,579.

The Emergency Medical Services budget is recommended \$6,957,261.

SPECIAL PROJECTS/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This year \$258,952 has been appropriated for the Wilkes Economic Development Corporation, which reflects a 3% increase. This will enable them to continue to work on job growth and existing business retention in Wilkes County. We are very excited that the Wilkes Commercial Business Center has been completed and are looking forward to working with Wilkes EDC on continuing this program with a second building in the future.

REVENUES

Ad valorem taxes for the recommended budget are estimated at \$41,350,545. This includes a 2.11% growth in real property tax values. We also project a 6.8% growth in motor vehicle tax for 2023-2024.

Sales Tax represents 25.55% of the County's revenue and is budgeted at \$25,475,936 which reflects a 3.0% increase over last year's amended budget.

General Fund Balance appropriation of \$7,367,837 is required to balance this year's recommended budget. In the County's most recent audit, the unassigned fund balance as of June 30, 2022 was \$30,562,541 or 44%. If we use the total of \$7,367,837 our unassigned fund balance would be estimated at \$23,194,704.

AIRPORT FUND

The Airport operating budget is recommended at \$4,825,289. We have budgeted for a second T-Hangar building funded by grants. This will be constructed on the 22 acre Airpark on the East side of the Airport.

LANDFILL FUND

The Landfill operating budget is recommended at \$4,485,051. Our current cell five has 3.6 years of life remaining. We continue to work on preliminary engineering for both Phases six and seven. We will begin construction of Phase six in the 25-26 budget with an estimated cost of \$7.2 million and 12 years of life; it will take 7 years to complete permitting for Phase seven. We are currently having a difficult time hiring and retaining part-time employees to work at the Convenience Centers. In the future, we may have to look at utilizing full time employees to fill these roles. Due to the many challenges we face, I am recommending a fee increase from \$43/ton to \$45/ton. For comparison, Surry County charges \$49/ton and in the future we expect the need for increases to continue.

OPIOID SETTLEMENT GRANT RECOMMENDATIONS

In the proposed budget this year, Wilkes County will be approving the use of proceeds relating to the Settlement of Opioid Litigation with the State of North Carolina per the MOU. Our Community Partners, The Health Foundation and the COPE Committee, helped determine what the priorities should be and made funding recommendations to the Board of Commissioners that align with what the County would like to see accomplished with this year's allocation. The funding recommendations for 2023-2024 are as follows: Wilkes Recovery Revolution \$379,372; Wilkes County EMS \$288,205; Mountain Health Solutions \$250,600; Hospitality House \$116,800; Project Lazarus \$54,000; NC Tech Paths \$45,000; Wilkes County Health Department \$22,087.50; Wilkes Youth Life Development \$11,000; and Wilkes County Public Library \$11,925; with a total recommended amount of \$1,178,989.50.

CONCLUSION

This budget year has been very difficult due to slow growth and the large funding requests from all outside Agencies. The economy and rising inflation has increased the cost of goods, services, and fuel, which impacts the cost of county services. Financial Experts are warning of a slowdown in consumer spending in the third quarter of this year, which would greatly affect our sales tax revenue. Other factors that may impact our budget are State and Federal mandates. Thanks to the resilience of our citizens, businesses, and employees, we do anticipate a small increase in sales tax and property tax collections. We strive to provide an efficient and productive work environment for our employees and the citizens who depend on our services. Delivering our services is, and will remain, our priority.

However, Wilkes County cannot do what we do for our citizens without attracting and retaining high quality, loyal, dedicated, and hardworking employees. The employees are once again our top priority for this year's recommended budget. Wilkes County has 510 full time positions, 29 unfilled open positions, 41 employees that have given notice or left the County since 12/30/2022, and it has been much more difficult to fill open positions.

We understand the budget is the single most important document approved by the Board of Commissioners each year. It is the County's basic plan of action for FY 2023-2024. As always, Wilkes County is very dependent on sales tax and we will continue to monitor the effects of our economy and rising inflation. Looking forward, thanks to the leadership and support of the Commissioners, we see opportunities for many positive impacts for Wilkes, to include our new and growing venues such as the North Wilkesboro Speedway, FaithFest, MerleFest, and the Brushy Mountain Apple Festival. In addition to the WCC Education Promise for all our high school students, we are also looking forward to the opportunity to continue to work with NC Tech Pathways. Construction will be completed on the new Wilkes Emergency Services Center by the end of this year and we will have the addition of a second T-Hangar at the Airport. We are also excited to move forward on construction of water and sewer utilities to the Speedway and surrounding area.

This is the Manager's recommendation and is now presented to the Board for your consideration. The staff and I stand ready to assist in any way possible.

Chairman Elmore stated he expected revenues to be up. Mr. Yates replied the tax base did not grow much. Commissioner Sexton said he would like to question the amount of increase to the County Employees at 5%; inflation is running 11%; they are not in a rough year and are not fighting for funds this year; his thoughts are to help the County Employees and that they should increase this to 7%, which is what they gave last year and would be appropriate again this year. Chairman Elmore said this is something they will discuss at the upcoming work session. Commissioner Johnson added they appreciate all the hard work in putting the Budget together, he has heard it said it is like a puzzle and putting all the pieces together and there are a lot of pieces.

2. SET BUDGET WORK SESSION – Chairman Elmore stated they need to set a budget work session.

Vice Chairman Stoney Greene made a motion to set a Budget Work Session for Tuesday, May 16, 2023 at 3:30 P.M. with the meeting to immediately follow in the Commissioners' Meeting Room located at the Wilkes County Office Building, 110 North Street Wilkesboro, N.C. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

The work session is open to the public.

3. SET PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED BUDGET – Chairman Elmore stated next, they need to set the Public Hearing on the proposed budget. Mr. Yates added no Fire Departments requested increases this year, in the past they have held public hearings on this as well, but it is not needed this year.

Vice Chairman Stoney Greene made a Motion to set a Public Hearing on the proposed FY 2023-2024 Wilkes County Budget for Tuesday, May 16, 2023 at 5:00 P.M., to be noticed and held pursuant to the requirements of the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act, with the Commissioners' regularly scheduled meeting to immediately follow the Public Hearing in the Commissioners' Meeting Room located at the Wilkes County Office Building, 110 North Street Wilkesboro, N.C. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson and unanimously approved.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES UPDATE – Chairman Elmore welcomed and recognized John Blevins, DSS Director. Mr. Blevins said he would like to provide an update on a few things, first May is national Older American month. DHHS is focusing on outreach, older adults experienced a lot of cuts in food and nutrition services with the emergency allotments that just ended. He added next is Medicaid expansion, after the budget is passed by the Legislatures, DHHS will pick a date and send a plan to CMS for approval. This will be no earlier than 45 days after the budget is passed or no later than 120 days. Mr. Blevins said CMS will work with counties to make sure both the counties and state are ready to implement this. The State is looking to front money for this, so the County won't have to pay first and then apply for reimbursement, which would be much better, and as he hears more he will let them know. In addition, he and Mr. Yates will attend a zoom meeting on May 15th for the State to discuss Medicaid expansion and how it will affect their budget in the upcoming year.

Mr. Blevins went over the monthly caseload reports for March at this time. Next, he went through the Foster Care financial report, Adoption Services financial report, Child Development and Subsidized Child Care financial reports for March. Mr. Blevins went over the CPS Foster Care monthly report for March at this time. He added they may have two kids they have to take into care this week and would have to stay in a hotel if that happens, but they are very close to completing the new space at Curtis Bridge to help with this. They are still continuing to work with Vanguard for the kid visits in the Raleigh area, this is working very well and helps the staff.

Commissioner Minton asked how many folks are they looking at adding with the expansion. Mr. Blevins said at one time the estimate was about 5,600 more folks, but the numbers are at least 2-years old. Vice Chairman Greene asked what are they saving with using Vanguard. Mr. Blevins said it saves time, keeping the staff here for that day, county vehicle cost, and keeps their comp time from increasing so much when they have to do this. They have not done a study on this yet, but there are at least 14 kids they go see. They will look into this, but overall it will be a cost savings monetarily and a savings in other respects for the staff as well. Vice Chairman Greene said they appreciate his smart management and he is sure the citizens do as well, sometimes they need funds somewhere else and this helps with those unknowns. This really helps to keep the employees here and with their family as well, they appreciate the job they do at DSS with some very difficult situations. Mr. Blevins agreed there is a monetary savings, but also a stress relief and allows them to have more of a work-life balance. Chairman Elmore asked if they are fully staffed. Mr. Blevins replied no, they have 3 social workers and 1 income maintenance position open and held interviews this week. They had 2 very good ones, it is improving, but they are still getting few qualified applications for some jobs.

CLOSED SESSION – Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson made a motion to go into Closed Session sitting as the Board of Social Services to discuss qualifications, competence, or conditions of employment of a Public Officer or employee or prospective Public Officer or employee pursuant to the personnel exception under G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(6). The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene and unanimously approved.

Motion was made by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene, seconded by Commissioner Casey Joe Johnson and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn back into regular session. No action was taken in the closed session.

ADJOURN – Motion was made by Vice Chairman Stoney Greene, seconded by Commissioner Bill Sexton and by unanimous vote adopted to adjourn the meeting of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners at 6:57 P.M.

Sarah D. Call, Clerk

Gideon Keith Elmore, Chairman

WILKES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Approved: June 16, 2023