The Avery County Board of Commissioners met in Regular Session on Monday, November 2, 2020 at 3:30 p.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC.

Members Present: Martha Hicks, Chair; Tim Phillips, Vice-Chair; Dennis Aldridge; Blake Vance; Wood Hall Young, Jr.

Members Absent: None

Call To Order
Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.
Dennis Aldridge led prayer.
Blake Vance led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Proclamations and Awards
Resolution Celebrating Trosly Farm
WHEREAS, Avery County is proud to celebrate Trosly Farm as 2020 North Carolina Small Farmers of the Year;

WHEREAS, Trosly Farm began in 2009; and

WHEREAS, Cooperative Extension at N.C. A&T State University presented the award to the Nidiffers on September 30, 2020; and

WHEREAS, Trosly Farm grows greenhouse products and livestock in Avery County; and

WHEREAS, Trosly Farm shares their farming knowledge with the community;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Avery County Commissioners hereby publicly recognizes and congratulates Trosly Farm as the 2020 North Carolina Small Farmers of the Year.

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Blake Vance to adopt the Resolution Celebrating Trosly Farm 2020 North Carolina Small Farmers of the Year. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Resolution In Support of the Ski Industry Season for 20/21

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Snow sports Industry generates $228 million annually toward the North Carolina economy and;
WHEREAS, the North Carolina Snow sports Industry supports over 1,500 jobs statewide, and;

WHEREAS, there are six (6) ski areas across the mountain region of Western North Carolina with two, Beech Mountain Resort and Sugar Mountain Resort, located in Avery County, and;

WHEREAS, the ski industry of the High Country is a significant driver of the local economy, and;

WHEREAS, North Carolina ski industry leaders from all six resorts are implementing operating best practices for as long as needed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Avery County Commissioners hereby support the opening of the North Carolina Ski Industry Season 2020-21.

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Blake Vance to adopt the Resolution In Support of the Ski Industry Season for 20/21. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Public Comment
There were no public comments.

Board Appointments
Agricultural Advisory Committee
There are four applicants for appointment to the Agricultural Advisory Board. Anne Avery Foster----Toe River District; Larry Smith---Newland District; Michelle Eggers Garner—Elk Park District; Nick Boone—Altamont District. These positions are for three year terms.

Motion by Tim Phillips and second by Blake Vance to appoint Anne Avery Foster (Toe River District); Larry Smith (Newland District); Michelle Eggers Garner (Elk Park District); Nick Boone—Altamont District to the Agricultural Advisory Board. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Chair Hicks stated that the Board would continue with the other items on the agenda until 4:00 p.m. when a public hearing is scheduled.

Tax Administrator Report – Bruce Daniels
Tax Collections Report
The Total Tax Collections for the month of October 2020 is $1,473,685.73.

Motion by Blake Vance and second by Tim Phillips to approve the Tax Collections for the month of October 2020 as presented. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.
Releases
The Total Releases for the month of October 2020 is $1,103.30.

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Tim Phillips to approve the Releases for the month of October 2020 as presented. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Sales
The total qualified sales for October 2020 is 155 sales. The total sales for October 2019 was 115 sales.

Economic Development Committee Expenditure
The Economic Development Committee is requesting approval for a $495.00 expenditure for advertising in the Avery County Chamber’s brochure. There has been a public hearing for this expenditure.

Motion by Tim Phillips and second by Wood Hall Young, Jr. to approve the $495.00 expenditure for advertising for the Economic Development Committee. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Contract for Specialized Consulting Services, LLC
This contract is for consulting services for FEMA reimbursement. This contract is for the period of November 1, 2020 until March 31, 2020 unless terminated before that date. The consultant would be filing and completing the paperwork for FEMA reimbursement for the COVID pandemic.

Motion by Dennis Aldridge and second by Tim Phillips to approve the contract for Specialized Consulting Services, LLC. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Finance Officer Report – Ashley Ingwersen
This was brought before the board last meeting. When entering in, I realized I entered in the numbers for the whole grant including matching County funds. What I needed to do is only show for the amounts that we were receiving from the Grant, which is correctly listed below.

The Avery County Sheriff’s Office requests a budget amendment to recognize a grant received from the Department of Public Safety for a domestic violence officer. The grant requires a 25% County Match.

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Blake Vance to adopt the Budget Amendment regarding the Domestic Violence Officer in the amount of $49,377.59 with a debit of $35,917.80 to Grant salary (105100.0240); debit of $2,747.25 to Fica (105100.0500); $2,012.85 to Retirement (105100.0600); $1,677.37 to 401K (105100.0800); $5,613.30 to Group Insurance (105100.0700); $332.77 to Cell Phones (105100.1360); $225.00 to Training (105100.1000); $851.25 to Travel (105100.1400) and a credit of $49,377.59 to Governor’s Crime Control Grant (103615.0000). Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

County Manager Updates – Phillip Barrier, Jr.
Community Building
The siding is almost finished. Heating should be on this week. The sound equipment is ordered. Furniture is ordered. Hopefully it will be finished the week of Thanksgiving.

Covid-19
There are 72 active cases and 10 citizens in the hospital. I want to challenge the citizens to see if we can get these numbers down.

County Attorney Report – Michelle Poore
Nothing to report that requires the Board’s attention.

Approval Of Minutes
Motion by Blake Vance and second by Wood Hall Young, Jr. to approve the October 9, 2020 Special Meeting Minutes; October 19, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes; and the October 19, 2020 Closed Session Minutes. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Agenda Consent Items
Adopted by Consensus of the Board.

Recess
Chair Hicks called for a brief recess.
Chair Hicks declared the meeting to be back in session after a brief recess.

Public Hearing Regarding 2020 Community Development Block Grant for the Coronavirus Program

Motion by Dennis Aldridge and second by Blake Vance to go into the Public Hearing at 4:00 p.m. Regarding the 2020 Community Development Block Grant for the Coronavirus Program. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Kelly Coffey, Representative from the High Country Council of Government, stated that this was the second public hearing regarding the Community Development Block Grant for the Coronavirus Program.

For this public hearing we will get into the specifics of what we are applying for. Since the pandemic started, it has become apparent that adequate internet service is critical for students that are not in the classroom all the time and having virtual classes; healthcare workers who are encouraging telehealth visits; employers that are having their employees work from home, etc. We are pursuing a formal application to benefit low to moderate income persons by providing high speed internet access to unserved and underserved areas of the county. Mr. Coffey explained that the county would be granting a subsidy to the internet service providers. It will be hard to estimate how many households would be served but we are thinking because of past grants that the county has received this would be around 1000 households. This, of course, is just an estimate at this time.
Mr. Coffey stated that there was a resolution and a citizen participation plan included in the packet that would need approval by the Board once the public hearing was over.

Chair Hicks asked if there were any public comments.

Maxine Laws, citizen and former county commissioner, stated that in the past there was a need for internet service but now it is an even bigger need because of the school children and businesses that are working from home. I am thrilled to see the county trying to carry this on and help with internet service.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. questioned if there was a percentage match. Phillip Barrier, Jr., County Manager, stated that the County would be asking the service providers to match dollar for dollar the grant. Mr. Coffey stated that as far as the county was concerned there was no match. The project would need to be completed within 30 months.

Dennis Aldridge stated that he thought this was a step that would help bridge more development in the future.

Phillip Barrier, County Manager, read a public comment that had been emailed to him.

I will begin by stating that I am proud to reside in Avery County; one of the extraordinary beautiful locations of Western North Carolina. I have called Avery County home since my early childhood. Growing up in a small county, especially one so beautiful, is a privilege. My husband was born and raised in the small, rural community of Plumtree. When making the decision to start our own family, there was no question that Plumtree would be our forever home place. One could say we have “put our roots down” here. The Plumtree community graces residents with the serene, peaceful Toe River, the breathtaking mountain peaks, and neighbors that treat one another like family. Despite the undeniable gifts that the Plumtree community offers, regretfully residents lack access to high-speed internet. The only current option for internet service is via satellite and rarely is this service reliable and fast enough for modern use. It also seems to be much more expensive than other faster and more reliable internet services.

In days gone by, access to internet and cell phone service where not deemed crucial. That is simply NOT the case today. Limited or no access to internet presents a huge problem. The problem is much more serious than missing out on watching the latest season of a favorite TV series. The problem is in today’s world, numerous tasks we complete in our daily lives are moving online, often exclusively so. Prior to the current pandemic, students were assigned internet-based homework. Tax filings, applications for government programs, and employment applications are more commonly submitted online. When was the last time you applied for employment via snail mail? Factor in the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and these problems are amplified.
As a resident of Plumtree, we have NO option to provide e-learning from within our homes. We cannot participate in our virtual worship services, order groceries and household items, search for employment, apply for unemployment, and needed programs from the safety of our homes in comparison to similar communities within Avery County. There is no acceptable reason why the children of Plumtree should not have the benefit of an optional virtual educational experience that their peers in other communities have. The families of Plumtree feel like our community has been left behind. To manage a household, to educate our children, and to conduct business remotely, residents of Plumtree desperately need high speed internet just as much as we do power, water, and telephone. “The COVID-19 era has proved that high speed internet is a necessity for everyday life.”

As an involved parent, I want my son to have an equal opportunity for education. A lack of internet access hurts businesses, hinders education, and prevents people from getting jobs. We cannot continue to sit in Plumtree, Avery County and let the rest of the world go by. Please seriously consider our plea to bring high-speed internet access to the Plumtree community. If it is within your power, authority, and means, the families of Plumtree urge you to afford our community, our children, and the generations to follow equal opportunities to access high speed internet.

Hayley I. Cook

Motion by Dennis Aldridge and second by Blake Vance to go out of the Public Hearing at 4:20 p.m. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Tim Phillips to adopt the Resolution for Avery County’s Application for Community Development Block Grant Funding for the COVID Relief Project. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Blake Vance to approve the Citizen Participation Plan. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.

Eagles Nest Holdings, LLC, Vineyard Reserve Phase II Subdivision Approval
The Avery County Planning Board has done a final plat review on October 26, 2020 for the Eagles Nest Holdings, LLC Phase II Lots VR-14 through VR-19 and VR-21 through VR-23. The Planning Board found the subdivision to be in compliance with the Avery County Subdivision Ordinance. It was approved and passed by motion that the Eagles Nest Holdings, LLC plat to be presented to the Avery County Board of Commissioners for their final approval.
Derek Buchanan stated that the Property Owners Association had approved funding for an additional water source for a 30,000 gallon water tank.

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Tim Phillips to approve the Eagles Nest Holdings, LLC, Vineyard Reserve Phase II Subdivision. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.**

**Blueberry Hill Subdivision Approval (A Planned Unit Development, PUD)**
The Avery County Planning Board has done a review of the Blueberry Hill Subdivision, a Planned Unit Development. The PUD subdivision falls under the guidelines of section 404 (4) of the Avery County Subdivision Ordinance of which requires 22,000 square feet of green space per dwelling unit (6 total). The green space is shown on the east portion of the plat and has been approved by the Planning Board. The final plat for the Blueberry Hill Planned Unit Development was approved by a motion of the Planning Board on October 26, 2020.

**Motion by Blake Vance and second by Wood Hall Young, Jr. to approve the Blueberry Hill Subdivision; Planned Unit Development.**

Dennis Aldridge questioned if there had been approval of the well. Daniel Kidd stated that the well was approved by the health department. Mr. Aldridge also questioned if the Planned Unit Development designation was included in the Subdivision Ordinance. Tommy Burleson, Director of Planning and Inspections, stated that this term did appear in the Subdivision Ordinance and that it includes townhouses, apartments, etc.

**Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.**

**Adjourn**
**Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Blake Vance to adjourn this meeting at 4:49 p.m. Motion unanimously approved (5-0) Hicks—Aye; Phillips—Aye; Aldridge—Aye; Vance—Aye; Young—Aye.**

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Martha Hicks, Chair
Avery County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:_________________________
Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk