The Avery County Board of Commissioners held a Board Workshop on Thursday, August 26, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. in the Commissioners Board Room, Avery County Administrative Complex, 175 Linville Street, Newland, NC. The purpose of the board workshop is to discuss and take any action necessary regarding the following items:

1. Sheriff Update
2. American Rescue Plan
3. FEMA
4. Charters of Freedom
5. Social Service Facility
6. School Construction
7. Opiod Settlement
8. Drug Crisis; Freedom Life
9. Veterans Monument
10. Fairgrounds
11. Room Tax
12. County Departments Information
13. NCACC Information

Members Present: Martha Hicks, Chair; Dennis Aldridge; Wood Hall Young, Jr.

Members Absent: Tim Phillips, Vice-Chair; Blake Vance

Call To Order
Chair Hicks called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

Sheriff Update
Sheriff Kevin Frye reported that the increase in the detention officer’s pay has made a significant difference in recruitment. We had six vacancies and we have just hired five to fill those vacancies. We had some experienced people that have applied which is a plus.

Sheriff Frye stated that he had named Cody Carpenter as the Animal Service Officer. There was discussion regarding this. There is a school resource position open at this time.

American Rescue Plan
Phillip Barrier, Jr. stated that Avery County will receive $3,410,241 of the 1.9 Trillion American Rescue Plan funds that was sent out. We have already received some money. The deadlines are by December 31, 2024 we need to have our money
obligated and by December 31, 2026 we need to have our projects completed. The entire nation has received ARP money. Congress has put the same deadline on everyone so it is going to be nearly impossible to try to do infrastructure projects. The NCACC is trying to push Congress to lift the mandates on the timeline.

Wood Hall Young, Jr. questioned what the money could be used for.

Mr. Barrier stated that the NCACC website listed projects that can be considered:

Support public health expenditures, by funding COVID-19 mitigation efforts, medical expenses, behavioral healthcare, and certain public health and safety staff.

Address negative economic impacts caused by the public health emergency, including economic harms to workers, households, small businesses, impacted industries, and the public sector.

Replace lost public sector revenue, using this funding to provide government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue experienced due to the pandemic.

Provide premium pay for essential workers, offering additional support to those who have borne and will bear the greatest health risks because of their service in critical infrastructure sectors.

Invest in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure, making necessary investments to improve access to clean drinking water, support vital wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, and to expand access to broadband internet.

Mr. Young questioned if $100,000 to $250,000 could be used for housing. There are 20-30 tiny homes planned for the lower end of the county through the Northwestern Housing Authority. The Dogwood Trust would match what we would give.

Mr. Barrier stated that if we make a plan today it is only recommendations because we still have to see what we can do. The recommendations from the Governor is to close the digital divide. The state is getting 5.7 billion dollars; he is recommending that 1.2 billion go to broadband. We have no rules on this though. The Governor is also recommending education and child care but again there are no rules set forth yet.

Mr. Young stated if we start some kind of program then what do we do when the money runs out. Mr. Young said he felt like this money should be used for infrastructure. Mr. Aldridge agreed and said that there had been discussion at a recent conference that he had been at about this same issue and that is going to be what some of the folks are going to run into.

Mr. Aldridge stated that there may be things that the state portion of the money can do that we cannot so we need to be sure that we take in consideration all they are able to
Mr. Barrier stated that some recommendations that he proposes for the ARP funds would be broadband; housing including workforce housing; premium pay for employees; daycare; and nonprofits. Of course, this would be dependent on the guidelines for the ARP funds.

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

FEMA
Mr. Barrier stated that at this time there is $160,000 that has been submitted for FEMA funds. When more of these funds come in, we would like to purchase a generator for the Community Center so that it could be used for an emergency operations center. We have ordered a side by side for emergency management. Viper is another thing that we need. State has come in and looked at our radios and they are willing to build a new tower. We have to pay for the fencing, gate and this gate has to have a code and also signage. They move all our communication equipment to the tower. I have met with the property owners and they are good with the gate.

Charters of Freedom
Mr. Barrier stated that the Charters of Freedom organization has the money to put the charters in Avery County. We need to find the right place and what our costs may be. I would like for the Board to consider putting the Charters of Freedom in front of the tax office windows in the front of the courthouse. I will contact them and discuss and then bring to a commissioner’s meeting for the Board to decide.

Social Service Facility
Mr. Barrier stated that we do not have the deed for the facility that we are looking to house Social Services in. In the state budget, there is $800,000 included for this facility. There is a process we could do that is a design build which just keeps from having to hire an architect. I would like to look at that process with this facility. I will keep the Board updated on this project.

School Construction
Mr. Barrier stated that $16,102,960.00 had been paid out on the high school addition and renovation project. Caleb Hogan, Finance Officer, discussed the expenditures so far with the high school project. Dennis Aldridge stated that we are at the point where we need to look at holding reserve based on completion. With the problems we have encountered, we need to have a substantial holdback. The only leverage I think we have right now is financial. Mr. Young and Chair Hicks agreed with Mr. Aldridge. The County Manager will discuss this with the superintendent.
**Opioid Settlement**
There is a settlement which include 850 million dollars over 18 years. It looks like 80% of the 850 million dollars for the Opioid Settlement will go to the counties. Avery County has sent in our Memorandum of Agreement and our Resolution. Every county in North Carolina will have to sign off before the money is released. There are still some counties that have not sent in their Memorandum of Agreement. The NCACC is working on this.

**Freedom Life**
Mr. Barrier talked about a program for reentry to society for anyone that is in jail. This is a program that has been started in McDowell County. Danny Hampton is over the one in McDowell County. This is a program that we would like to start in Avery County but there has to be a lot of community support. We are talking with Dogwood Trust about a grant for a planning and development person. The grant would be for $50,000. It will take at least a year for this person to get this started and get the community support.

**Veterans Monument**
Mr. Young stated that in 2014 when we were in the process of getting the Veteran’s monument that he had brought up for discussion about including the Revolutionary war and Civil War veterans. These were not included in the monument. Mr. Young said he would like for the County Manager to look into this and get some information together.

**Fairgrounds**
The fair will be taking place the first week of September. Mr. Young brought up about the field outside of the outdoor stage. He would like some work done on that field like putting sod down. The other commissioners agreed that something needed to be done. The County Manager will look into the cost of this.

**Room Tax**
There was discussion regarding the occupancy tax. It will be January before the bill regarding occupancy tax will be presented in the General Assembly. The projected occupancy tax could be around $700,000 a year.

**County Department Information**
Mr. Barrier directed the Board’s attention to the Avery County website and Avery By The Numbers. These numbers were discussed.

**Adjourn**
Motion by Wood Hall Young, Jr. and second by Dennis Aldridge to adjourn this board workshop at 2:10 p.m. Motion unanimously approved (5-0).

Martha Hicks, Chair  
Avery County Board of Commissioners

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Cindy Turbyfill, Clerk