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Despite the bad weather, the people of AC came out in droves to voice their opinions on Economic Development in Avery County. The issue was a Resolution to reconsider the disposition of the old Banner Elk Elementary school and the plan to turn it into an incubator versus selling the building and using the proceeds to cover the cost of the new Elementary School. The concerns of the Republican Party Executive Committee was that the plan for the incubator would be a drain on the taxpayers of Avery and become a 'money pit' in regards to repairing, refurbishing and maintaining a 74 year old building. Commissioner Griffith stated he is for Economic Development but against beer in the incubator, that after a letter of intent was submitted to start a brewery at the incubator. Glenn Johnson spoke of the great divide in Avery County and its lack of a middle class. Enrollment at Avery High is fewer than700 and the school capacity is 1200. Mr. Johnson expressed his fears that Avery is losing its young people who graduate and leave the County to find jobs elsewhere. Cranberry used to be a center of commerce; there are 4 major industries in Avery; agriculture, horticulture, tourism and second homes. Small business makes up 50% of today's businesses and only 44% survive. It is a fact that an incubator program for small business can increase the survival rate to 87%. The incubator program has been in existence since the 1950's and 33 counties in NC are home to them. Mr. Johnson stated “We must look towards the future.” Over 15 people signed up to comment ranging from Dr. John Boyd, President of Mayland Community College who ranked 4th in the Country as a top Community College nationwide, to the Superintendent of Schools, David Burleson, to business owners and concerned citizens. People were overwhelmingly in support of bringing jobs to the County, providing opportunity to our young people and the need to continue to push for technical and economic development. Brett Gardella the recently hired Economic Development Director was praised over and over for the work he had done. Charles Dunn, Mountain Electric spoke of the many ways Mountain Electric supports the businesses in Avery County thru grant money and the need to keep our goals of a higher standard of living. Johnny Carson asked the Commissioners "not to take the foot off the gas pedal." The consensus of all who signed up to speak was Avery must continue to focus on Economic Development and proceed with the incubator program. Hank Hardin, voted Teacher of the Year on the importance of Internet Infrastructure in Avery, said "We must stay the course, climb the mountain to assure that every homeowner in Avery County has internet access. This issue today is what getting electricity to every homeowner was in the 1940's. Mayland Community College could teach courses and people could get jobs installing wireless internet." He said home based businesses can do business all over the world with wireless internet. Bret Gardella has been making progress with an internet provider and the hope is by March many more residents will have access and the issue will be addressed until every homeowner has access. Meanwhile, the Avery Republican Party Executive Committee addressed the issue of flagrant absenteeism by a Board Member. The concerns were that truancy is not responsible leadership and in the case of an excessive truancy Commissioner they cannot interact personally with citizens and be available and accessible to the constituency that elected him/her and an absence from the County is derelict from the desire, concerns and will of the people he/she was elected to serve. The Commissioners addressed the issues and came to the determination that based on the general laws they have no statuary authority to remove an elected official due absenteeism and the issue will be resolved in the next election.