

**MINUTES OF A  
WORK SESSION  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
OCTOBER 10, 2023**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on October 10, 2023, 1:00 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Mark A. Letson, Chairman	Don Adams, County Manager
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	John Kubis, Interim County Attorney
Mark Jones, Commissioner	Representative (Via Zoom)
John W. Smith, Commissioner (Via Zoom)	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
Tom Stribling, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

**(1) GREAT GRANT AWARD:** Tiffany Henry, Economic Development Director stated the GREAT Grant Program was funded by both federal and state dollars from the North Carolina Department of Information and Technology (NCDIT). Each county in North Carolina received one GREAT Grant Award of up to \$8 million, with no one provider receiving more than \$4 million. Jackson County received an award earlier in the year to Charter Spectrum for just over \$4 million. After the initial distribution to all counties, there were funds remaining.

Jackson County had seven to eight GREAT Grant applications submitted by the internet providers. The county had no input as to who applied or what address points were covered. After the initial distribution, funds were awarded to the next highest scoring applications. Jackson County received a second round of funding to Balsam West. She provided the map showing mapped address points for Spectrum and Balsam West.

Mr. Adams stated the Board set aside up to \$600,000 of ARPA Replacement Funds for these matching grant applications. For the majority of the original applications submitted, the county committed to the 7.5% match, which allowed them to score the highest on the grant application process.

Ms. Henry stated Balsam West's award amount was \$2,431,130.90, which would make the county's match requirement \$182,000. This grant would serve 636 locations. She presented Exhibit J that would require approval and signature to commit the \$182,000 match.

General discussions were held.

**Consensus:** *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

**(2) STATE EXTENSION RAISES – COUNTY MATCH:** Rob Hawk, Cooperative Extension Agent requested a county match with the state salary increase of NC State Employees of 4%. This would be a 4% match of the county extension salary portion with the state salary portion. The total would be an approximate \$3,386 annual increase to the County Extension budget.

**Consensus:** *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

**(3) SUMMIT CHARTER SCHOOL:** Chairman Letson requested to be recused from discussions on this item. He had a conflict of interest as he served on the Summit Charter School Board of Trustees. He turned the meeting over to Vice-Chair Bryson.

Commissioner Jones moved to recuse Chairman Letson from the Summit Charter School item due to a conflict of interest. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Sarah Jennings, Chair, Summit Charter School Foundation, Inc.; Rob Hunter, Treasurer, Summit Charter School Foundation Inc.; and Kurt Pusch, Head of School, Summit Charter School, were present for this item.

Mr. Adams stated this was a new topic of discussion for the Board. A new law (House Bill 213) had been passed in the state that specifically allowed counties to consider and fund capital needs for charter schools. He noted that if the county moved forward with real property improvements or reimbursements, it required the county to take a deed of trust on the property.

Mr. Pusch stated, as provided by North Carolina Session Law 2023-107i, Summit Charter School Foundation, Inc. (Foundation) formally made a request for a loan from the Board of Commissioners in the amount of \$2,500,000. The funds would be for the construction of a new high school building on the campus of Summit Charter School located at 370 Mitten Lane, Cashiers.

Summit Charter School was a North Carolina tuition-free and non-profit public charter school, first authorized by the State Board of Education on March 15, 1997. The Foundation was a separate 501(c)3 that owned the property Summit Charter School was located and raised funds to support Summit Charter School.

Since 2019, Summit Charter School experienced 28% growth in enrollment and as a result, the school reached its current facility capacity. The construction of a new high school building would expand the school's facility capacity to support current and future enrollment growth at Summit Charter School, as well as support the growing population of the county.

After a formal Request for Proposal process, the Foundation engaged JDavis Construction of Anderson, South Carolina, as general contractor for the construction project and contracted Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) with JDavis Construction of \$5,835,425.00.

The Foundation was debt-free and was committed to funding the full cost of the construction project through private donations, foundation and corporate grants. For this purpose, in August 2023, the Foundation publicly launched a capital campaign and to-date raised \$4.8 million toward a \$6.5 million campaign goal. Their goal was to have commitments totaling \$6.5 million by August 2024. Of the \$4.8 million raised to-date, they received \$2.8 million in-hand and the remaining \$2 million in donation pledges.

The purpose of the Foundation's loan request was to bridge their cash flow needs during construction as they raised and collected the total fundraising goal of \$6.5 million. If approved for a capital construction loan by the county, the Foundation expected to repay the full amount of the loan within thirty-six months of the loan origination date. They anticipated paying all necessary closing costs associated with the loan, as well as monthly interest as to be defined and agreed upon in the terms of the loan agreement.

The Foundation understood the deed of trust on the property, on which construction would occur, would be transferred to the county and the county would execute a release of the deed of trust when the Foundation repaid the loan in full.

Vice Chair Bryson asked about setting the interest rate for the loan.

Mr. Adams stated it was up to the Board, but if the goal was to keep the county whole, the Foundation would cover the closing costs and cover the interest the county would have made on the money. The current interest rate was approximately 5.5%. He noted this was a loan request instead of a grant, which distinguished it from the public school system and the community college system requests. If this was a grant request, he would recommend they prioritize this with the other needs that would be coming before the Board.

If the Board wished to consider this request, he recommended the funds be to be taken out of the General Fund Balance. The timeline of cash in hand for the Foundation would be the first of the calendar year, if the Board moved to authorize the County Manager to move forward to acquire the services of a local closing attorney to prepare the necessary documents.

General discussions were held.

**Consensus:** *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

**(4) FOSTER CARE REINVESTMENT PROGRAM:** Cris Weatherford, DSS Director and Shelley Foreman, Vaya Health Community Relations Regional Director, were present for this item.

Mr. Weatherford presented: Child Welfare Enhancement Funds: Foster Care Reinvestment Funds:

**(a)** History of Child Welfare Enhancement Funds:

- Child Welfare Enhancement Funds vs. Foster Care Reinvestment Funds vs. Sub-Cap payments
- In November 2020, Cardinal Innovations launched a program aimed at supporting children in the custody of social services departments across their region. The plan included a \$30 Million investment to fund a monthly payment, referred to as the Child Welfare Enhancement Fund for every Medicaid-eligible child in foster care.
- During the consolidation efforts, Vaya committed to continuing the funding through June 2023 for the counties who transitioned to Vaya and were receiving the monthly payments.
- Each month, participating counties receive a portion of the Per Member Per Month (PMPM) capitation payment that Vaya receives for every Medicaid-eligible child in foster care.
- Originally, payments could be used to support members who were entering custody and/or to prevent children from entering custody. There was limited tracking of the spending.
- With the goal of obtaining data to support continuing the project past June 2023, Vaya worked with counties to develop a tracking mechanism for the spending with spending going towards the following areas identified by DSS and Vaya:
  - Custody Prevention
  - Reduce # of Children in Residential Care
  - Reduce Length of Time in DSS Custody
  - Reduce Placement Disruptions
  - Interim Supports Between Placements
  - Support Kinship Licensure
  - Increase Family Engagement
  - Access Non-Medicaid Funded Supports
- In June 2023, After gathering the data and doing a cost analysis, Vaya's Executive Leadership Team approved the continuation and expansion of the project.

**(b)** Current Participants: Alamance County, Chatham County, Rowan County, Stokes County

**(c)** Amount Spent for Each Indicator – all counties:

- Access non Medicaid funded needs \$190,747.32
- Reduce placement disruptions: \$186,384.24
- Interim supports between placements: \$102,658.81
- Custody prevention: \$35,147.40
- Increase family engagement: \$7,698.63
- Reduce time in custody: \$5,192.35
- Reduce residential care: \$1,500.00

- Kinship licensure: \$1,100.26
- Total amount spent: \$530,429.01
- (d) Looking Forward: Continuation and Expansion of the Funding:
  - Vaya's ELT approved the continuation and expansion of the project.
  - Alexander and Jackson counties have been identified to expand the project.
  - Alamance, Chatham, Rowan and Stokes would continue to receive the funding. Would also be a support for Alexander and Jackson as they got started.
  - Funding Focus:
    - Custody Prevention
    - Reduce Length of Time in DSS Custody
    - Reduce Placement Disruptions/Interim Supports Between Placements
    - Support Kinship Licensure
    - Access Non-Medicaid Funded Supports
- (e) Next Steps:
  - Internal Next Steps:
    - Vaya Provider Network working with Finance and Legal to update/finalize contracts
    - Current participating counties informed of expansion (completed)
  - External Next Steps:
    - Ashley to schedule calls with Alexander and Jackson to introduce the project and confirm willingness to participate. (complete)
    - Confirmation by Alexander and Jackson that they want to participate
    - All participating counties would receive new or updated contracts.
    - Spreadsheet for tracking spending would be updated and provided to counties. Tracking submitted to Vaya Health on a quarterly basis.
    - Quarterly meetings with all counties receiving the funding for collaboration /troubleshooting/technical assistance.

General discussions were held.

Ms. Foreman stated the per member per month amount would be based on the number of kids in the plan who were in foster care. They were looking at approximately \$30,000 per month. The money was very flexible. The funds were paid every month and it could be carried over. The reporting process would be easy for the county to use the funds. The goal was to keep as many kids as possible in their family and in their community.

Mr. Adams stated the next steps would be for DSS to create a general budget with flexibility to allow them to proceed forward. The Board would vote on a budget amendment to put the program in place for the DSS Director to start expending funds.

Ms. Foreman stated Vaya was working to develop the contract template and hoped to have this completed in the next couple of months.

**Consensus:** *Add this item to a future regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

(5) **SAVANNAH COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTER:** Mr. Adams stated there were multiple community centers within the county with the majority being owned by nonprofits. The Savannah Community Development Center was owned by a nonprofit. Annually, the county allocated \$1,500 to assist the community centers with general maintenance. Occasionally, the centers had needs the \$1,500 would not cover.

He presented a request received from the Savannah Community Development Center Board of Trustees. The request was for assistance with the completion of repairs and upgrades to their facility. This included repairs to the ceiling and adding handicap parking spaces.

Quotes received for the repairs and upgrades:

- Estimate to drywall ceiling: \$4,580.00
- Parking Lot:
  - #1 ABC stone and 78mm spread on new handicap parking area \$4,536.00
  - #2 78mm stone and spread on existing driveway and parking areas \$2,800.00

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Jones stated he thought community centers throughout the county were the heart and pulse of the communities. Historically, the Board had given the support.

Chairman Letson stated he thought it was a worthwhile cause to get the parking corrected, especially considering it was a voting center.

Ms. Fox stated there was \$10,000 in the Community Building Renovations fund.

Commissioner Bryson stated the building was well used in the community.

**Consensus:** *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

**(6) PUBLIC LIBRARY COMPLEX ADDITIONAL PARKING STUDY:** Mr. Adams stated this issue had also been discussed at a previous work session. The county purchased the Galik property, which was located next to the Library, in 2019 for \$50,000. The initial concept of purchasing the property was for additional parking for the Library. The county previously acquired the services of Victor Lofquist for an estimate to knock down the existing house and create parking, which was estimated to be \$757,450.

There had been interest from a citizen to purchase the property. If the Board accepted an offer, it would then have to go through the upset bid process. If the Board moved forward with a sale, he would request to build a barrier between the properties prior to selling to avoid parking issues they had in the past.

Also, the house had been damaged in a fire, so the county boarded the windows and made the property as safe as possible. They had to make sure the property would be safely accessible or not accessible at all. If the Board chose to make the house a public facility, they would have to take into account ADA accessibility.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Stribling asked if the parking at the Library was always full? Did they need to spend the money for a parking lot that would not be used?

Mr. Adams stated at times, they did have issues with parking, but it was not always full.

Commissioner Bryson suggested to take the house down and put in an access road from the lower road and make it a gravel parking lot.

Chairman Letson suggested to take the house down and leave the area with the old trees intact. There was an existing park not far from this location. Could they incorporate this area into the park for green space and create a seating area?

Commissioner Jones stated he liked Chairman Letson's idea. He also wanted to have the engineer to go back in and look at the middle part of the property from Keener Street for possible parking spaces.

Commissioner Bryson stated he liked Chairman Letson's idea. He also wanted to see what the property was worth. He wanted to see all three options for the Board to consider.

Commissioner Smith stated he asked Mr. Adams to bring this issue back up. He was approached by a citizen to see if the property was available for purchase.

General discussions were held.

Mr. Adams stated he would go back and look at what it would take to knock the house down and what it would take to make it useable. The Board could then decide if they wanted to proceed forward or sell the property. He would bring this item back at a later date with more information.

*Informational item.*

**(7) ANIMAL SHELTER NAME CHANGE:** Mr. Adams stated in the planning of the Animal Shelter, they started with the name “Animal Rescue Center”. He received feedback from Health Department and Animal Shelter staff that the “animal rescue” portion of the name had connotations they were a “no kill facility”, which was not the way they were operating. He made the request to change the name to “Animal Shelter”. There were circumstances, when dealing with rabies etc., where animals had to be put down.

The Health Department had goals of increasing the Live Release Rates. This included partnering with other entities and nonprofits to decrease the number of animals that were euthanized. They were trying to keep their live release rates, through adoptions and nonprofit transports in the 90 percentile and higher to save as many animals as they could.

At that point, there was only one sign that would need to be changed and then they could proceed forward with ordering entrance signage.

**Consensus:** *Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

**(8) LICENSE PLATE AGENCY:** Tabitha Ashe, Tax Administrator was present for this item.

Mr. Adams stated this item was previously discussed at a work session. Since that time, the License Plate Agency advertised and had a couple of private businesses apply. However, these private businesses did not qualify, so the License Plate Agency re-advertised.

Ms. Ashe provided a report to the Board: Sylva License Plate Agency (LPA):

**(a) Introduction:**

- The Sylva LPA/Tag Office played a critical role in the community, offering a variety of motor vehicle registration and titling services.
- The Sylva Office would cease operations on December 15, 2023 after being operated by the Painter family since 1971.
- The NC Division of Motor Vehicles (NC DMV) advertised to solicit application for a new operator on August 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- After receiving and reviewing applications, the contract was re-advertised on October 9<sup>th</sup>.
- Currently 126 LPAs in NC.
- Since 1961, LPAs had been operated by independent contractors
- First local government operated LPA in 1995.
- Currently, there were 23 local government operated LPAs.
- With the implementation of the tag and tax together system in 2013, the tax office and LPA became more interconnected than ever before.
- The NC DMV was the collecting authority for registered motor vehicle property taxes.
- The LPA focused on vehicle registration and renewal while the county tax office was responsible for valuation and situs.
- The LPA could not adjust an assessed value or taxing district.
- Combining the two offices would provide the most benefit to the citizens, allowing them to challenge the assessment, correct any situs discrepancies, request a proration and renew their tag all in the same location.
- The tax office was familiar with the inner-workings of the LPA and had a good working relationship with Sylva and Swain County
- Both offices worked together to assist the customer.

**(b) Operations:**

- It was expected to take six months for the LPA to be operational.
- Potentially three months or more with no LPA services in the county.
- It was estimated to cost as much as \$25,000-\$30,000 for upfit, furniture, signage and travel expenses.
- Space must be ADA compliant and have adequate parking, lobby space and secure storage for inventory.
- NC DMV provided computers, printers and paper.
- There were two potential space options available. Would require NC DMV approval.
- The Sylva LPA was considered a Tier II facility with 67,000-69,000 transactions per year.
- Tier II was 50,001-100,000 transactions.
- This was the average transactions for the five most recent fiscal years.
- Tier II allowed up to three personnel.
- It was requested to have a manager, two clerks and the personal property appraiser, who could be cross trained for staffing shortages.

**(c) Prior to the LPA becoming operational, the following would need to occur:**

- Approval to apply by the Board of Commissioners;
- Application and last audit financials submitted to NC DMV;
- Interview with NC DMV;
- Application approved by NC DMV;
- Additional positions and upfit costs approved by the Board of Commissioners;
- Positions advertised, interviewed and hired;
- Upfit completed by the Public Works Department;
- Computers and printers provided by NC DMV and installed;
- Three weeks training for all new personnel in Rocky Mount, NC;
- Requirements completed for personnel to be notaries;
- Website updates and public outreach for citizens.

**(d) Financial:**

- Two sources of LPA revenue: transactions and notary fees
- The transaction fee was currently \$1.89
- Proposed notary fee schedule:
  - One signature: \$7.00
  - Two signatures: \$8.00
  - Three or more signatures: \$9.00
- Annual expenses included personnel and office supplies

Estimated Revenues	
Transaction Fees	\$125,500
Notary Fees	\$25,000
Total	\$153,500
Estimated Expenses	
Personnel	\$168,414
Office Supplies	\$2,500
Total	\$170,914
Net Profit (Loss)	(17,414)

General discussions were held.

Mr. Adams stated they were requesting permission to apply. He could provide the Board another update at the November 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Consensus:** *Staff to proceed forward to make application to NC DMV for the Sylvania License Plate Agency.*

There being no further business, Commissioner Stribling moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 2:59 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mark A. Letson, Chairman