

**MINUTES OF A  
REGULAR MEETING  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
MAY 6, 2013**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on May 6, 2013, 2:00 pm, Justice & Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Rd., Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Jack Debnam, Chairman  
Doug Cody, Vice Chair  
Charles Elders, Commissioner  
Vicki Greene, Commissioner  
Mark Jones, Commissioner

Chuck Wooten, County Manager  
J. K. Coward, Jr., Co. Attorney  
Pat Parris, Clerk to Board

Chairman Debnam called the meeting to order.

**AGENDA:** Commissioner Elders moved to approve the Agenda. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

**MINUTES:** Commissioner Jones moved to approve the Minutes of the Work Session and Regular Meeting of April 15, 2013. Commissioner Cody seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

**PROCLAMATION:** Chairman Debnam read a Proclamation honoring older Americans.

**Motion:** *Commissioner Cody moved to proclaim the month of May as Older Americans Month. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried.*

**PROCLAMATION:** Chairman Debnam read a Proclamation honoring law enforcement officers.

**Motion:** *Commissioner Cody moved to proclaim May 12-18 as National Law Enforcement Week and May 15<sup>th</sup> as National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Day. Commissioner Elders seconded the Motion. Motion carried.*

**(1) COMMISSIONER REPORTS:** Commissioner Greene reported that the TDA consultant has been working to come up with several “brands” which will be reviewed by the TDA who will narrow them down to two and then present them at a public meeting on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. She attended a legislative update meeting with the County Manager in Cashiers on May 3<sup>rd</sup> at which Congressman Mark Meadows discussed some current legislative activities. The Chamber of Commerce plans to have monthly updates from state and local officials.

**(2) COUNTY MANAGER REPORT:** Mr. Wooten reported:

**(a) March 2013 Unemployment:** The March numbers continue to show a decline in unemployment as the March rate was 9.5% which is a 1.0% decline from February. Excepting Haywood and Clay, Jackson's rate continues to be lower than the other western counties.

**(b) Quarterly Building Permit Report:** Activity continues for both residential and commercial building permits. Even though the first quarter residential permits were 3 less than the same quarter last year, 10 of the permits issued were for houses with a value greater than \$400,000 or larger than 4,000 sq. ft. During 2012, a total of 34 permits were issued for these types of houses so the first quarter report was strong. In the area of commercial permits, the first quarter of 2013 reflects 11 permits were issued as compared to 9 in the first quarter of 2012. There is more activity for commercial permits and the staff is currently reviewing several sets of commercial plans.

**(c) Emma Properties:** The sale of the property in Jackson Plaza closed on April 29<sup>th</sup> and it is anticipated that Dr. Mahar will be constructing a medical office building on that site for his practice. The delay in closing concerned an easement for sewer service; however, as soon as that specific issue was resolved the transaction closed.

**(d) Tax and Tag:** The July bills for vehicle taxes were scheduled to be issued in May for payment in July when a person renews their license tag; however, because of some software issues with the 600 car dealers in North Carolina the system implementation has been delayed by two months. Bills will be issued in July for September renewals so the Tax Collector will continue issuing bills and collecting taxes until then.

**(e) Yellow Mountain Property:** The estate gift to the Senior Programs and Mountain Projects has closed and Darlene Fox is reconciling all costs associated with the property that were incurred while managing the property until closing. She will be distributing 50% of the net proceeds to Mountain Projects in the near future. The Senior Programs will utilize the funds for furnishings and equipment in the Cashiers Senior Center.

**(f) Wireless Internet Service:** Gerald Green and he conducted two conference calls with Keith Conover with the NC Department of Commerce about internet service in Jackson County. Discussed was the possibility of conducting an on-line survey to assess the demand for internet service in the County. Utilizing this information, all internet providers will be invited to a meeting to understand their plans for expanding their footprint and how to service the areas which are either underserved or have no service at all.

**(g) Meeting with Congressman Meadows:** The Cashiers Chamber of Commerce will be hosting a meeting on May 3<sup>rd</sup> with Congressman Meadows to update him on transportation and infra-structure needs in the Cashiers area. He will be attending that meeting along with Gerald Green.

**(h) Business and Industry Advisory Committee:** The organizational meeting is scheduled on May 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm in Room A227. Scott Hamilton and Tom Johnson from AdvantageWest will be attending to update the committee on economic activities in western North Carolina, recent success stories, and talk about how Jackson County can be prepared to respond to an economic development inquiry. A proposed job description for an economic development director will also be reviewed.

**(i) Jackson ABC Board:** The ABC Board continues to look for possible sites to house a Cashiers ABC Store. On Wednesday, the ABC Board voted to run an ad in the Cashiers paper to officially solicit proposals for a site and building. Once proposals are received, the ABC Board can evaluate them and begin negotiations for a site that meets its needs. The ABC Board members will be attending ethics training on May 15<sup>th</sup> and has scheduled the next meeting on the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> before going to Asheville for training.

**(j) Upcoming Meetings:** NCACC County Assembly Day – May 22<sup>nd</sup> in Raleigh; Region A Board meeting – May 9<sup>th</sup> in Cherokee.

**(3) CULLOWHEE VALLEY SCHOOL – ROOF REPLACEMENT BIDS:**

Mike Murray, Superintendent, stated that five bids were received. He presented an opinion letter from Cort Architectural and the School Board attorney concerning bid bond requirements. The bid was separated into a base bid and two alternates. The base bid represents the portion of the roof that has failed and needs repair while Alternates 1 and 2 were for the portions of the roof that have not currently failed. A total roof replacement would cost \$1,196,784. The low bidder was disqualified because licensure requirements were not met. The next low bidder was Service One, Inc. The architect's letter explained the reason the base bid came in over the estimated cost is because complex mechanical and electrical work is required. Alternate 2 only requires minor exhaust fan work. The repairs will be done during the summer months. He stated it would be more cost effective to complete both the base bid and Alternate 1 at the same time. He requested funding for the entire roof replacement, but as a minimum consider the base bid plus Alternate 1. The School Board budgeted \$100,000 for the project and will be responsible for designer fees and any other costs associated with the project.

Mr. Wooten stated the base bid is \$621,087, Alternate 1 is \$238,954, and 5% contingency is \$43,002 for a total of \$903,043. If approved, funding for the project would be from the fund balance.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Jones moved to fund the project in the amount of \$903,043 from the fund balance. Commissioner Greene seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(4) SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS:** Nan Tritt, SRO Officer, stated she serves as the SRO officer for Scotts Creek Elementary and the School of Alternatives. SRO's serve as a resource to all members of the school community by providing education, intervention, counseling and deterrence in addition to a timely response to criminal activity that may occur on school grounds. The officers also monitor sports activities and other school functions throughout the year. Children have the right to attend school and be provided an environment wherein they feel safe.

**(5) JUVENILE CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL:** Steve Lillard, JCPC Chair, stated the Dept. of Juvenile Justice allocates funds to counties on an annual basis. He presented the selected programs, certification, membership list, and proposed funding for FY2012-13 in the total amount of \$169,712. The selected programs are JCPC, Aspire Day Treatment, Project Challenge, Hawthorne Heights, and COMPASS. The required local match is \$19,773.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Greene moved to approve the programs, certification, funding plan, membership list, and local match. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(6) ABC BOARD:** Mr. Wooten stated the ABC Board has submitted an interim budget of \$12,000 and has requested a loan in that amount for start up/organizational costs. The largest portion of the budget is associated with board member per diem expenses since they are compensated at the rate of \$150 per meeting. The NC ABC Commission has requested that the board members attend ethics and training in Asheville in early June thus the need for travel expenses. He recommended that the County hold and disburse the funds until such time as the ABC Board has obtained a depository and appointed a finance officer.

In addition, when a site is selected, the ABC Board will be requesting an additional \$200,000 for expenses associated with opening the new store.

***Motion:** Commissioner Greene moved to advance funding in the amount of \$12,000 from the Contingency Fund for start up costs at 2% interest, but no payments are required until 12 months after the store opens. Commissioner Cody seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(7) RETIRED EMPLOYEES HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN:** Mr. Wooten stated that since his appointment as County Manager, there have been questions concerning retiree health insurance as it relates to eligibility. In 2001, the Commissioners adopted a plan that established certain hire dates and levels of service required for eligibility in the plan. There has been a continuing discussion whether vesting credit years were those years with Jackson County and whether the vesting credit years were continuous without a break in service. Presently, 86 retirees participate in the health plan, 24 current employees are eligible for retirement and 34 more employees will be eligible in five years. If all eligible employees should retire over the next five years then the potential liability for health insurance could exceed \$1.3 million annually. In reviewing information from the NC Association of County Commissioners, the majority of counties provide a retiree health insurance benefit; however, there are many different variations since it is an optional benefit and the full cost is borne by the county.

He presented a proposed plan which clearly states service must be continuous with Jackson County. In order not to adversely impact any current employees, the proposed change would be applicable only to employees hired on or after an established date. Since 2001, at least 10 persons have met the retiree health insurance service requirements by combining service from another local government. The proposed plan would eliminate confusion about service credit and continuous years of service. An argument may arise that limiting service with Jackson County only could cause problems in recruiting new employees especially if someone is from another local government. If the minimum threshold is 20 consecutive vesting credit years with Jackson County, then mid-career employees could see this as a negative. The other side of the argument is that the Board would be rewarding a career Jackson County employee.

As adopted, the 2001 policy leaves too much room for interpretation and it would be in the County's best interest to clarify the policy for future employees of Jackson County. Currently \$9,203.04 is budgeted for each full time employee and retiree under the age of 65 and \$6,925 for each retiree 65 years of age or older. In all likelihood, these costs will not go down in the future.

He suggested that the proposed plan be reviewed and changed, in some instances, from "consecutive years" to "cumulative years".

**(8) WCU RESOLUTION (R13-13):** Mr. Wooten presented a resolution in support of NCDOT using small construction and pedestrian enhancement funds for safety improvements on NC 107, Blackhawk Road and Centennial Drive on the campus of WCU.

***Motion:** Commissioner Elders moved to adopt the resolution. Commissioner Cody seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(9) PLANNING BOARD:** Carry Over

**(10) COUNCIL ON AGING:**

***Motion:** Commissioner Jones moved to appoint John Chicione to a term of 3 years on the Council on Aging Board of Directors. Commissioner Elders seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(11) TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD:**

***Motion:** Commissioner Greene moved to appoint Philip Moore of Region A Southwestern Commission, Alice Mason of the Clean State Coalition, and Eddie Wells, Dept. on Aging Director, to the Transportation Advisory Board. Commissioner Cody seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**Public Comments:**

(a) Marie Leatherwood of Sylva stated that an economic loan to GSMR violates North Carolina laws.

(b) Ray Gorton of Sylva stated GSMR is fully functional without a steam engine. The Bryson City operation has grown by leaps and bounds. GSMR proposes that Jackson County loan them \$700,000 which will basically give them a working steam engine to increase their profits. GSMR stands to benefit in ways that will not benefit Jackson County other than Dillsboro getting a promise of six jobs and that is what \$700,000 will buy. The turntable location would deprive visitors of having sufficient parking so they would have time to eat and shop. Alternatives for Dillsboro would be to support the trend in river and mountain sports such as rafting, tubing, bicycling, and hiking.

(c) Eileen Kessler, of Sylva stated economic development is important to Jackson County but the focus must be inclusive and not just exclusive to GSMR. Attracting younger tourists and professionals is essential. Keep in mind the area's rich natural landscape and it is time to promote river use as the primary recreational attraction in Dillsboro. Whitewater training and a recreational center located in Dillsboro will draw adults and children to enjoy the Tuckaseegee River. A boat launch is already in place and there are plenty of empty store fronts for shops to sell merchandise relating to sports like hiking, rafting, repelling, climbing, zip lining, biking, etc. Mountain biking is another popular outdoor activity which could provide income for local merchants as well if a trail is constructed from Dillsboro to Whittier. Converting Dillsboro into a thriving town requires a concerted effort and forward looking concepts.

There being no further business, Commissioner Jones moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Greene seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.

Attest:

Approved:

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Patsy C. Parris, Clerk to Board

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W. J. Debnam, Chairman

