

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
MAY 28, 2020**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Budget Work Session on May 28, 2020, 8:30 a.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Brian McMahan, Chairman	Don Adams, County Manager
Boyce Deitz, Vice Chair	Heather C. Baker, County Attorney
Mickey Luker, Commissioner (via Zoom video conferencing)	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board
Ron Mau, Commissioner	
Gayle Woody, Commissioner	

Chairman McMahan called the meeting to order and stated that this was an opportunity for the Board to hear from the non-profits that had made requests during the budget cycle. This would be an overview to provide additional information to the Board as they evaluated the budget before making decisions. This was a different format than usual with the presenters joining the meeting via Zoom video conferencing.

(1) AWAKE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER: Renee Coward, Executive Director of AWAKE, (via Zoom video conferencing) thanked the Board for the opportunity and gave a report of how AWAKE was operating during the COVID-19 epidemic, expected projections and how this impacted the Board.

They were essential workers during that time. They were conducting forensic interviews and medical exams on potential child abuse victims. They had to gage the risk of the children staying in precarious situations versus the risk to staff contracting the disease. They were using masks, gloves, taking temperatures and washing hands before essential services were conducted on-site.

Their numbers were about the same as they were last year at about the same time. Case management had increased dramatically as they were contacting their families more than they would ordinarily because of the situation. They had sent over \$5,000 of assistance, at the request of families in need for food, rent, utilities, transportation assistance. Additionally, they sent care packages out to each of their children, which was over 60 and it included snacks and craft items they could do with their families at home. They had also been reaching out to the Spanish speaking population in conjunction with Vecinos and translated articles on how to manage stress. They were looking forward to increasing that connection in the community.

Even with all this, they were still worried as child abuse happened in the best of times. The National Children's Alliance stated that 1 in 10 boys and 1 in 5 girls would be sexually abused before the age of 18. The CDC website showed even more dramatic numbers that 1 in 4 children would suffer child maltreatment in their lifetime. Those were in normal times and they were not in normal times. They did anticipate in the fall, when hopefully schools and daycares were fully operational, they would see a dramatic increase in the numbers of reports from children because at the time, they did not have anyone to report to.

They were preparing with a child medical examiner that was contracted to work with them one day each week. They had two forensic interviewers and the assistance of a Spanish translator. They were concerned about the upcoming increase in numbers. They were also concerned about coming to the end of a five-year lease on their building.

Looking back over a five-year period, their numbers had increased dramatically in the county. They anticipated that this was a continuing trend because they thought there was more awareness in the community and greater correlation between the Department of Social Services Child Protective Services and Law Enforcement working with them. They appreciated the fact that the Commissioners helped to keep their doors open in the last year, especially with the lapse in grant funding due to federal shutdowns and gaps in reimbursements.

Commissioner Woody thanked Ms. Coward for all that she had done with serving the children in the community. She noticed in the report, she stated every month they met collaboratively with representatives from the different agencies and that each meeting approximately 20 cases were discussed involving 30+ children. Were those new cases or cumulative?

Ms. Coward stated that the cases were cumulative in terms of they would tend to have 10-12 new cases each month. In addition to that, they were following up with the other cases.

Commissioner Woody stated that she mentioned that they gave out food and assistance with bills. United Christian Ministries had extra food at that time. They wanted to let every agency that was working with the families to know that they had excess food and supplies at the time.

Commissioner Luker asked if they were seeing an increase as of that day or was it typical to start seeing more cases as they went months down the road from a disaster?

Ms. Coward stated that at that time, it felt like they were seeing less children, but they would tend to see less children during the summer months. They did tend to get more reports of alleged child abuse when they could tell a safe person. The safe person would tend to be a school teacher, guidance counsellor, etc. There were reduced possibilities for that now.

Chairman McMahan thanked REACH for what they had done. It was a very important service in the community.

Informational item.

(2) COMMUNITY TABLE: Paige Christie, Director (via Zoom video conferencing) thanked the Board for all that they had done and the support they gave them. The support the Community Table received in general had been overwhelming. They started having conversations with their board members at the end of January about what they were going to do. Early on, they started to restructure what they were doing and how they could preload food into the community in case of shutdowns.

They purchased a meal packing machine so they could prepack meals and freeze them so they would have enough in quantity. They also started preordering extra food and doubling the orders to Manna in February. They gradually eased their clients into an outdoor setting where they would have carry out and then as the danger increased, they setup a drive through system. For about two weeks, they did the food boxes every week instead of every other week. They were down to a crew of five staff and volunteers.

They had about a 30% increase in new families into the program and they went from serving 2,000 meals per month to just over 3,000. They had slowed down a little, so they felt they were in a good place as far as meeting the needs of the community. Moving forward, they were working on low-contact fundraisers, buying individual tables for outdoors and trying to look at different ways to bring the community back to the Community Table and not just be an emergency food service.

Chairman McMahan thanked them for providing a very important service in the community. They did a tremendous job and he applauded their efforts.

Informational item.

(3) HERE IN JACKSON COUNTY, INC.: Robert Cochran and Destri Leger were present (via Zoom video conferencing) for this item.

Mr. Cochran presented: HERE in Jackson County Homeless Services Program:

- Agency Totals: October 31, 2019 – Present 213 days and ongoing:
 - Total nights: 6,896
 - Total adults: 147
 - Total children: 24
 - Total individuals: 171
 - Total families: 40
 - Total single people: 70
 - Total households: 110
- Cold Weather: 30-day Program 10/31/2019 – 03/31/2020 145 days:
 - Total nights: 3,666
 - Total adults: 56
 - Total children: 14
 - Total individuals: 70
 - Total families: 16
 - Total single people: 24
 - Total households: 24
- Code Purple Program: Subfreezing nights 54 days:
 - Total nights: 455
 - Total individuals: 75
 - Total adults: 63
 - Total children: 12
 - Total families: 13
 - Total single people: 36
 - Total households: 49
- COVID Shelter: 3/25/2- present: 66 days and ongoing:
 - Total nights: 2,775
 - Total individuals: 64
 - Total adults: 50
 - Total children: 14
 - Total families: 14
 - Total single people: 27
 - Total households: 41
- Clients Permanently Housed:
 - Total individuals: 95
 - Total families: 27
 - Total single people: 18
 - Total households: 45

Mr. Cochran stated that they had a huge increase from years before. But they were very proud of the total number of households they were able to get into permanent house, which was almost double from last year. It had been suggested and they liked the idea of moving forward with target groups. They wanted to prioritize families with children, elderly and disabled people.

They would be looking at a limit of 12 rooms with unlimited for Code Purple, which were freezing nights. They would have expectations for people in the 30-day Program for effort and progress. They would have 30 days guaranteed according to the state and internal standards. After 30 days, it was contingent upon their efforts and progress towards permanent housing and doing what they could to help themselves and move forward.

Mr. Adams stated that if they could think about two pots of money regarding the homeless shelter. One was the \$130,000 that was budgeted, which was for the Cold Weather Shelter. The second pot of money was the COVID-19 funds. What HERE had been doing over and above the Cold Weather Shelter was only possible because of FEMA and COVID-19 funds. All of the funding for COVID-19 would end December 31, which they would still be in the cold weather season at that point. That would create challenges and HERE was working on a transition plan out of the COVID-19 Shelter.

Commissioner Woody stated that it was stated that HERE was committed to working with Dogwood Health Trust, if and when it was selected to administer the Health Opportunities Grant for Western North Carolina. Dogwood Health had mentioned that they had grant writers available for people that had proposals. Had they looked into that for possible funding? She wondered about a possible permanent location.

Mr. Cochran stated that they had received a couple of relatively small grants from Dogwood Health Trust. They had not pursued the permanent location yet, but it was on the table and something they would like to pursue.

Chairman McMahan thanked them for the work they had done and especially being able to step up during the unprecedented times to help fill in a gap that no one could have envisioned would have been created.

Informational item.

(4) APPALACHIAN WOMEN'S MUSEUM: Cathy Busick (via Zoom video conferencing) thanked the Board for the support they had given and their continued support. This was a very interesting time for them as they not only had to retool and deal with COVID-19, but they had been impacted by a DOT road for local traffic. They had to deal with the construction of that, which ran through their yard and was just a few feet in front of the Women's Museum porch.

They had used that time to focus internally on what they could do, which included improvements to the house and anticipation of hooking up to the anticipated sewer system, which the progress was stopped. They did have water to the porch from TWSA, but they did not have any plumbing and was not hooked up to septic. They added some line items to their budget request knowing that they did need to create a plumbing system for when they did get to hook up.

They did have concerns about the DOT moving forward with plans for the Old Dillsboro Road from Dillsboro to Sylva to reroute the traffic through the park instead of building the second bridge. The last traffic count from DOT in 2017 stated there were 8,880 vehicles on that road daily. Their parking would be on the other side of the road, so it would be a recipe for disaster with events and fundraisers. Also, they did have to cancel the third annual Airing of the Quilts, which was their big spring fundraiser.

Commissioner Woody stated that she hoped they could still have the Airing of the Quilts in the future, as she knew of many ladies who had been working on quilts during this time.

Ms. Busick stated that on appwomen.org they had just published a gallery of all the quilts from the 2019 Airing of the Quilts.

Commissioner Luker stated that he did think it was a recipe for disaster if they did not go with the second bridge. It was unfortunate, unfair and definitely not right for the Appalachian Women's Museum.

Ms. Busick thanked him for saying that, but she thought they were in a minority viewpoint.

Informational item.

(5) COMMUNITY FOUNDATION: Norman West and Erin McManus were unable to make a connection via Zoom video conferencing. They would send a letter to the Board.

Informational item.

(6) UNCOMPLICATED KITCHEN: Jenna Kranz (via Zoom video conferencing) stated that there was no shortage of places where people could go to get a hot meal. She knew there was no place people could go to learn to do that themselves. That was what Uncomplicated Kitchen was attempting to do for the county. She spent four years selling her granola at the Farmer's Market and people went to her to ask her all of their healthy food questions. She felt that people really needed these skills and to have someone to work with them one on one.

She received her Master's degree in English Education and studied rhetoric and composition. She also specialized in writing centers, which was a place of open access for people to work alone or schedule appointments with tutors. Food was her gift, but writing centers were her academic base. This was what she was transferring to Uncomplicated Kitchen. Before the COVID-19 crisis, they had worked one on one with many students. Currently, they transferred it to online classes.

They originally wanted a place to expand class offerings and were at the Extension Center, but they were only able to use it a couple of times a month. Through the COVID crisis, it taught her that this community kitchen was a place that would become an open access community kitchen with multiple workspaces with office hours where she or another volunteer would be available for people to ask questions. They did have a dietitian, who had volunteered to answer questions about nutrition. They wanted an equipment lending library and to have a space to put together food boxes, which would make them eligible to partner with food banks. She was currently running this out of her home.

Commissioner Deitz stated that he would like to sit down with her sometime to go over all of the information. It was evident that she had a passion for what she was talking about.

Commissioner Mau stated that he had watched some of Ms. Kranz's videos and she was very creative and interesting.

Commissioner Luker stated that he had bought a lot of Ms. Kranz's granola at the Farmer's Market. What she had proposed was what he had heard many other say was needed. He appreciated her vision and encouraged her to stay on track.

Mr. Adam asked what her relationship was with Cooperative Extension, the Family Consumer Science and the current kitchen?

Ms. Kranz stated that she knew Rob Hawk based on her Farmer's Market experience. She was at a meeting with them to help develop a commercial kitchen because she built her own commercial kitchen for her granola business. She inquired if she could teach in their classroom and Mr. Hawk agreed. She also volunteered with 4-H to help kids learn how to cook.

Informational item.

(7) EQUINOX RANCH: Margo Capparelli (via Zoom video conferencing) stated she wanted to let more people know about Equinox Ranch what they had been doing for years. They had been building and adapting the old Cotton Robinson place in Cullowhee to fit the needs of their program. When it was finished, it would be a ten-bedroom facility that would house up to 12 veterans at a time.

They incorporated over five years ago and were hoping to open in November. It had been a very long project since they were a grassroots organization. They received donations from individuals, companies and in-kind donations. In the grant, they were requesting help with the septic system. They had an online fundraiser to help with the sprinkler system. They also needed an HVAC system. They were an all-volunteer organization. They had veterans mowing and doing whatever needed to be done.

The program was specifically for combat veterans. They would be with them for two weeks enjoying the area. They would have counselling or group counselling available to help them be more at ease and realize it was a safe place. They would also get some experiences away from the civilian world for a few weeks. They would then go back home and they would get services to support them as much as they could in their hometowns. Then, seven to eight months later, they would come back for another two-week session. The idea was that they recognize the problems that veterans faced were deep. They spent a lot of time developing a program that they believed would work and give combat veterans the things they needed to heal.

Commissioner Woody asked if they had a relationship with the Veterans Services Officer in the county?

Ms. Capparelli stated that she had reached out on many occasions since they first got the property. Ms. Setzer was aware of the program.

Informational item.

(8) ARTS COUNCIL: Justin Allman and Lena Woods were present (via Zoom video conferencing) for this item.

Mr. Allman stated he was the President of the Arts Council of Jackson County. He thanked the Board for everything they had done for them. The mission of the Arts Council was to promote individual artists, foster appreciate for the arts, provide art education and inspire creativity in the county. They did that in a few different ways by promoting excellence in artistic expression, citizen engagement and involvement, encouraging a culture of creativity and supporting the artist at all levels to accomplish enrichment in community life for all citizens. They worked with a few groups for their 2019-20 income funds:

- \$16,643 Grassroots
- \$8,000 Taps
- \$10,000 Jackson County
- \$4,500 Membership/Sponsorship
- \$3,000 Fundraising
- \$2,000 Registration for JAM Program

The Jackson County Arts Council (JCAC) sponsored events for 2019-20:

- T-shirt design completion for all county high school students. The winner was a Jackson County Community School Student, Josie Smoker, who received her artwork and name on the t-shirt, \$100 and a complimentary shirt for her and her art teacher. They were now selling the t-shirts in the community.
- JCAC gave to Jackson County Public School supply funds for each visual art teacher as needed. They gave \$3,000 divided between each school. They also reached out to find private grants as well.
- They also do a Glaze It Program at WCU, which was very successful.
- They sponsored the Art Youth Month in February with over 400 entries.
- They did forego the Cartwheels Grant to do something different by using \$3,000 to create their own JCAC Native American Cultural Arts and History Program to be presented to all Jackson County 6th and 7th graders, but the event had to be cancelled due to COVID.
- The Baby Grand Piano party had to be cancelled, but they did have ten county pianist to perform.
- The Grand Piano had been used for weddings, parties and concerts.
- They sponsored Jamming with JAM each spring.
- They kept the older programs, they were just adding and growing.
- The Rotunda Gallery was well used that year.

Ms. Woods stated that the Junior Appalachian Musicians (JAM) Program was an after school program for grades 3-12 instruction and performance opportunities in mountain heritage music with traditional Appalachian instruments. The program was offered to all Jackson County Public School Students and to all Home School Students.

Mr. Allman shared many other events that JCAC was involved with throughout the year such as Greening Up the Mountains and Mountain Heritage Day.

Informational item.

(9) WNC COMMUNITIES: Jennifer Ferre (via Zoom video conferencing) stated she was the Executive Director for WNC Communities for the past year. She thanked them for the continued support throughout the years. The support from county governments helped sustain WNC Communities for 70 years. Their mission was to support and develop opportunities in rural community clubs as well as having a positive impact on agriculture and forestry throughout the region.

In the past couple of months, they had been emphasizing the work they had been doing with the communities. The community organizations were the backbone of rural communities, providing hubs for community engagement to help deliver vital programs and services for their members. Through their program such as WNC Honors Awards, these communities receive help through cash awards that helped their vital programs. They had also been able to offer grant writing assistance to communities to get grants for different opportunities and educational opportunities as well.

During the COVID-19 crisis, it really placed a spotlight on how important these communities were for assisting their members. Because of county funding, WNC Communities was able to remain Opportunity Ready, they were able to help families in households in communities in Western North Carolina, which resulted in feeding people directly. They were involved with food distribution to community centers throughout 20 counties in Western North Carolina.

Commissioner Deitz thanked them for all that she and L.T. Ward did and the time they put in. They did a great job.

Informational item.

(10) CASHIERS AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: Stephanie Edwards, Executive Director (via Zoom video conferencing) stated they appreciated their close partnership with the county and looked forward to continuing that.

Generally, their mission was to provide leadership as an advocate for business, an information source for the community and to serve as a conduit for building destination awareness and responsible growth. They represented over 400 members, including businesses, nonprofits and Associate Members in Cashiers, Glenville, Sapphire across Southern Jackson County. They also served as a contract agency for the Jackson County Tourism Development Authority operating the Cashiers Visitor's Center in the Chamber Building.

Newly added strategic initiatives:

- Community engagement
- Leadership Cashiers
- Identified Hispanic business development and support
- Destination management
- They worked closely to help with the small business continuity response and recovery
- Health and Wellness
- Highlands-Cashiers Health Foundation
- Workforce Development
- Pedestrian Mobility and Safety
- Broadband Connectivity
- Infrastructure Development working closely with TWSA

Programming overview:

- Publish the Cashiers Area Visitor Guide and Membership Directory – 20,000 each
- Produce the Cashiers Area Shopping and Dining Guide – 20,000 each
- Provide Member and local Small Business support
- Operate the online Community Calendar for South Jackson County
- Developed and promote the Cashiers Area Jobs website
- Erected and manage the Crossroads Banner display
- Sponsor Community Forums and Legislative Updates

Also, since there was no municipality, they raised the money and installed destination signage on their gateway approaches to Southern Jackson County. They also produced the annual Christmas Parade, the Community Spirit Awards and much more. She thanked them for the partnership they had enjoyed for the last number of years. They appreciated the financial support as well.

Commissioner Woody thanked Ms. Edwards for her quick response when she reached out to her so that she could reply to some of the business owners in Cashiers that had concerns. What was she hearing from the business owners in response to COVID-19?

Ms. Edwards stated that they conducted a business survey two weeks ago and prior to that there was a lot of anecdotal feedback, which was optimistic. Although they were turning into a year-round destination, they did have the element of seasonality, which worked in their favor because it came at a time when they were not in high season. Their local businesses had the benefit of being able to anticipate what was to come. It was still optimistic, but there was some apprehension about what the recovery would look like and the extent of it. Through research, data and forecasting, she thought they were very well positioned in Western North Carolina and particularly in Jackson County as being a very desirable destination.

Informational item.

(11) WATERSHED ASSOCIATION OF THE TUCKASEGEE RIVER (WATR):

Ken Brown, Executive Director (via Zoom video conferencing) thanked the county for the funding they received for the past year and were looking forward to a great partnership that year.

Some of their accomplishments included partnerships that had greatly enhanced their ability to impact the watershed and resources. The monitoring they had done, along with the state and the county, had led to some actions. Other accomplishments included partnering with American Rivers, the Town of Sylva and the NC Department of Environmental Quality on the Bridge Park Concept Plan. Also, they had been gifted a sophisticated software program that would allow them to plug in various areas in all of the sub-watersheds to monitor and observe activities.

One of their goals was to enhance the economic viability of the watershed. It was their belief that the primary obstacle to that was the amount of sediment they were losing. It took a lot of time, energy and effort to keep up with the monitoring and mitigation. The program would allow them to bring in grant funding for restoration, repair and partner with the residents along the stream to enhance their property value and clean the water along their property.

They were recruiting volunteers to track metrics in those areas so they could plug that into the mapping system they were working with. They were partnering with RC&D, Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District and Erosion Control and had isolated several places that were potentially going to receive grant funding from the state to do restoration. They were looking for monies for an intern to help create a map story of the entire Tuckasegee River from the headwaters. They were developing multifaceted educational programs and redeveloping their website so they could assist teachers to teach water chemistry and watershed management.

Chairman McMahan thanked them for the work they did.

Informational item.

(12) WEBSTER ENTERPRISES: Joe Rigdon, CEO and Mike Bowler, CFO were present (via Zoom video conferencing) for this item.

Mr. Rigdon stated that they had been up and running during the pandemic. As of that day, they had 45 employees and he was proud of the fact that they had added seven individuals, who were displaced workers. They had a tremendous increase in demands for their manufactured medical devices. Several of the drapes and wraps they manufactured were going specifically to treat individuals that had COVID-19.

Their programs had fallen somewhat with school closing in early March and they were not able to complete the school year. There were 167 students providing services through the Project Search Program in conjunction with SCC. Pre-ETS Program where they were working with students in the high school areas was suspended as well. They were attempting to do some remote work in conjunction with Vocation Rehabilitation, but they were only able to reach about 10% of those students and keep those things going.

Last year, they requested a support agreement from the county for a \$100,000 loan with First Citizens so they were able to provide services to students in the county. They discussed a timing difference of them being able to provide the services and getting a reimbursement from the state, which was a three to six-month delay. That was still the same situation. On that particular loan, there was \$53,000 outstanding and they had been paying it up and down as they had been getting payments in. They anticipated that at the first of September, they would take the First Citizens loan back to zero. Their hope was that the county would agree to support that loan for another year so they could continue providing those services.

In the 2019-20 school year, they provided services to 74 students who had a diagnosed disability. Of the 74, 18 graduated that year from high school. Three of the students moved on to receive services from the Adult Services Program of Vocational Rehabilitation. Of the 18 students, they felt 17 were available for adult services. There were six candidates eligible for the Project Search Program. In the next school year, they would have 56 students that would be enrolled, which they would add more as school went on.

They also had a contract with Vocational Rehabilitation and were seeing a move for community based training, rather than facility based training. They were working with them to increase that so that they could go into employer sites and provide the same skills they did on site at Webster for individuals in those programs.

In response to the pandemic, they worked closely with Harris Regional Hospital and were able to donate 1,700 gowns as they were in need of those for Personal Protective Equipment. Also, they were requesting for the next fiscal year to continue the support agreement for the loan at First Citizens and they were requesting \$35,000 for operating costs.

Commissioner Woody stated that as a retired teacher, she was so pleased to see the number of students they were connecting with before they got into the cycle of unemployment and disenfranchisement from the community. She thanked him for that work.

Mr. Rigdon stated they had a really good School Board and were fortunate to have Jake Buchanan, Assistant Superintendent, as he was on the Webster Enterprises Board as well. They thought the school system did a great job.

Also, before the pandemic, they were in the midst of rebranding. Webster Enterprises had been their name since 1976 and they had been at Webster since 1985. They were going through a name change and rebranding to Westbridge Vocational. They felt that talked more about their service area and what they did.

Informational item

(13) JACKSON COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: Julie Spiro, Executive Director (via Zoom video conferencing) stated that they had been serving as communication central on this end of the county. They had been working the entire time either from home or in shifts in the office. They had been able to help small businesses with resources or connect them with resources that allowed them to continue to stay in business. They had done Zoom's with small businesses to see what their needs were during that time and connected with them for items needed, such as masks or hand sanitizer on a local level.

They had called every member and worked with them to set up a virtual online store, if they did not have one set up already. They would continue to reach out to the small businesses and help them through the process and get them ready for things to increase their revenue streams.

They had been working with Rich Price, Economic Development Director, on everything from the 107 Team, the Recovery Task Force, Wifi Hotspots, buildings that were available for sale and for rent and businesses that were at risk. Most recently they had worked with Mr. Price on the All in Jackson Fund, which 14% of the fund had been spoken for at that time. They were continuing to promote that to their members and the business community at large.

Stephanie Edwards and the Highlands-Cashiers Foundation funded Clean Station sanitizing units for all of the restaurants in Macon and Jackson County. They also worked collaboratively on a grant and received \$50,000 for those units. They were the sweat equity party by putting them in place and providing the sanitizer. It was a large county effort to try to keep people healthy and safe and would be in place for years to come. They hoped it helped develop a lifetime of healthy habits as people entered restaurants, they would be using touchless sanitizer to get inside.

They also helped their restaurants through delivery set up, takeout and Facebook paid booths to get people to notice who had takeout and who were still open. She was proud of them for sticking with it and continuing to try. People were coming back, so they were optimistic. Also, they did collaborate with the TDA on just about everything they did.

They had hoped to put in place that year a new program called Jackson 101, which would be one on one with people who were new to the area. It would allow people to come into their facility by appointment for them to share information with them about the county. They did have to stop that due to COVID, but hoped to start it back up.

They did postpone and rescheduled Concerts on the Creek. They hoped if they could do it safely, they would, if they could not, they would not. For the July 4th fireworks, she believed they should do it no matter what. It did not mean they would necessarily gather at Bridge Park and have a live concert because that gathering may be too large and exceed the Governor's restrictions and orders.

At the very least, they needed to do fireworks. People expected them and needed them. People could watch them very safely from cars from three different avenues into downtown Sylva, so she felt it would be easy to have fireworks so that people could enjoy them from their cars, if they had to go that route. They would make that decision when they had more information from the Governor. They were open for porch service and were waiting on visitors outside safely and hoped to open interior service the next Friday with parameters in place for safety.

Chairman McMahan thanked them for all that they did and had done.

Informational item.

(14) SOUTHWESTERN CHILD DEVELOPMENT: Sheila Hoyle, Executive Director; Vicki Lewis, Nursing Supervisor; and Crystal Smith, Family Resource Center Supervisor, were present (via Zoom video conferencing) for this item.

Ms. Hoyle stated that Southwestern was celebrating their 47th year of providing services in the county. They were proud to claim county government as a partner from day one. The county had always been beside them when they had been able to bring in additional state or federal funds by preparing a county match and supporting them. They had a long and positive collaboration over the years and she thanked them.

Ms. Lewis stated she was coming before the Board for the third year and the county had always been very supportive of the Nurse Family Partnership, which was a program that served first time mothers anytime during their pregnancy below 28 weeks and until their baby was two years old. Last year, her four nurses made 1,990 visits, traveling as much as 100 miles per day.

Currently, they were serving 31 clients in Jackson County, which was one of the largest areas they served. During the pandemic, they had worked full-time. The National Service Office would not allow them to do home visits, so the nurses made phone calls, Facetime and texting. They had doubled their visits from 40 per month to over 80 per nurse per month.

Referrals were down and they believed it was because of COVID that they were not seeking care. They did encourage them to get care and to not be afraid. They encouraged all of their clients that had dropped out of school to get their GED and many of them were now moving on to get their CNA Certification and then on to become RN's.

Since 2014, they had made 9,982 visits and served over 300 families. Out of all of those, only two children had been permanently removed from the home because they encouraged it to happen because it was a dangerous situation. The foster system had proven they were keeping babies out of the foster system. Also, they identified developmental problems early to get help for them. Any way they looked at it, for society, for the county, for everyone, the program was a win-win situation because they were helping the people that were the future.

Commissioner Woody stated that she was privileged to go to one of the graduations and she was so gratified to see the young mothers and how they were parenting and how they were moving on with their lives. All of them said it was because of the support of the nurses.

Informational item.

(15) MOUNTAIN MEDIATION SERVICES: Gabby Grant (via Zoom video conferencing) stated that last year was their 25th year of providing services in the county and they were grateful to continue with the opportunity to partner with county government.

They had seen a decrease in mediation with district criminal over the last year and with the COVID situation suspending courts, it had decreased. However, they had an influx of community mediations including divorce and mediation of folks that did not want to go to court. They hired a new coordinator at the end of 2019 and she had done a great job of streamlining services and built a good partnership with the DA's office. When mediations happened on court day, folks could come for mediation immediately, if the judge referred them so they would not have to take more time off work, which had been an improvement in their services.

Also, they were trying to build connections with private attorneys to let them know their services were available for their clients. They would be opening up mediation for small claims court as well. They had been able to do community mediations via zoom and were working out how that would look when court resumed with social distancing. They were happy to continue services and expand with their new youth services in the county.

Informational item.

(16) CIRCLES OF JACKSON COUNTY: Dawn Neatherly (via Zoom video conferencing) thanked the Board for their leadership through the COVID crisis. Their biggest news was that they became independent in October of 2019. They had grown to a point that they felt they could be self-sustaining without Mountain Projects. They were wonderful to help them get started, but they were ready to move on.

COVID made a real impact on their clients because the majority of them worked in the service industry. They had been doing all the things they had been encouraging them to do and then suddenly the COVID crisis happened. The COVID crisis had shown in intangible ways that the program worked. The Circle Leaders had emergency savings accounts because they taught them how to do that. They knew how to reach out for help early and be direct in what their needs were. They knew how to find help to access all of the assistance that was coming through the government, but they did not go back on public assistance.

She was proud that all of their clients were making at least partial payments on all of their bills during the crisis. Many of their clients did not have internet access, so all of what they did was face to face. They had to make adjustments and learn to rely on the telephone. They were calling Circle Leaders two to three times per week and checking on their volunteers.

They reached into their emergency fund to help with food, necessities, medication and keeping access to their phones. They had on average given out \$500 per week over the course of the last two months. They did receive some emergency grants for assistance. Also, they were not able to have their major fundraiser, which was 30% of their annual budget.

They were focusing on clients to make sure they had grocery money so they could keep their bills paid. Going forward, they were still on track with their young adult program. WCU agreed to pilot with them for the first class in the fall with at risk students with an emphasis on local students. By the spring, they intended to open the program to any 17-25-year-old college student or citizen of the county.

Chairman McMahan stated that they very much appreciated what they were doing.
Informational item.

(17) REACH OF MACON COUNTY: Andrea Anderson and Wesley Myers were present (via Zoom video conferencing) for this item.

Ms. Anderson stated that this time period of being at home so much had increased the opportunities for domestic violence to occur. They had seen an increase in their shelter numbers for both Macon and Jackson Counties by about 100% and 150% for calls from this time last year. They had been fortunate to access some of the emergency funding that had been available so that they able to provide alternative locations when they were full so they did not have to turn anyone away that needed emergency shelter.

In the shelter, they had implemented measures for social distancing. In addition, there had been a higher increase in their clients needing food assistance and living expenses, which they had been able to meet most of those needs. It had been a challenging time, but they were able to continue to provide services.

Since last year, REACH of Macon County provided services to 100 victims of sexual violence and 13 victims of human trafficking in Jackson County. So far that year, they had 19 human trafficking clients. They had been providing domestic violence service in conjunction with the Center for Domestic Peace (CDP). Last year, they provided services to 238 victims of domestic violence.

They had been working jointly with the Board of Directors of CDP and REACH with the goal of having CDP become a standalone domestic violence service agency for Jackson County. They had recently been able to hire an Assistant Director for REACH that focused on Jackson County and would spin off and become the Executive Director of CDP. At that point, CDP would provide the domestic violence community based services. REACH would continue to provide the shelter and support services for victims of domestic violence as well as all of the services they provided to victims of sexual assault and human trafficking in Jackson County. She introduced Wesley Myers, Assistant Director for REACH.

Mr. Myers stated they were rapidly moving toward this separation and applying for state grant funding to be able to provide the citizens of Jackson County and the victims of domestic violence with community based resources that REACH had been providing for many years. They would still maintain a close relationship with REACH of Macon County to provide shelter while they were ramping up to add a shelter of their own. They were very excited to be able to continue to provide some things such as job training and support, court advocacy, counselling and referrals for different agencies to help get clients to a stable and safe space.

Ms. Anderson stated that this would be a very cooperative relationship. They would both continue to work out of the office space the county provided for them. In addition, CDP would be launching a domestic violence hotline for Jackson County. REACH of Macon County would also maintain their crisis line as well. They would work together to coordinate services for victims.

Chairman McMahan thanked them for what they did, it was so valuable to the community.
Informational item.

(18) CHRISTMAS CONNECTION: Brian Chamberlin and Marilyn Chamberlin were present (via Zoom video conferencing) for this item.

Ms. Chamberlin stated that the biggest accomplishment for 2019, besides serving the children of the county, was that they became a standalone organization with 5013c status obtained on September 20th. As a result, they created a board of directors and an advisory board. They continued to maintain a relationship with Care for Kids in Asheville, who donated a lot of items to them when they had overstock including clothes, school supplies and toys.

They served 509 children, which was down from previous years, but they were in constant contact with DSS and other organizations. They served a total 221 families. Key donors were the Commissioners and St. Jude in Sapphire, the Cashiers Methodist Church and WCU provided a number of volunteers, including the athletic program sponsoring 75 children. They received donations from Hell on Wheels, raising \$2,500 and 200 toys. Other partners included Headstart, Southwestern, DSS, Health Department, HERE in Jackson County and the Public Schools.

Mr. Chamberlin stated that they had a partnership with St. Jude's Catholic Church because they were a distribution point for them. They also used the Cashiers United Methodist Church to do that. They had a drop-in, fill-out location at the Cashiers United Methodist Church to service the southern end Blue Ridge district. They posted information in different locations about where people could go and how they could get the assistance to get the word out.

Looking at the financial report with donations and fundraisers, they got just short of \$8,700. With the \$5,000 from the county, that gave them a cash income of about \$13,700. They spent about \$12,700 through all the purchasing of the gifts and storage unit, which gave them an ending balance of \$960. There were no paid employee or staff of any kind. Everything was 100% volunteer.

Ms. Chamberlin stated that they already started spending the \$960 on December 26th with the sales to buy clothing and toys for the coming year.

Mr. Chamberlin stated that the financial report was as of January 1st. They did get almost \$43,000 if they looked at the donations, sponsorship and Care for Kids in Asheville. They also had space and electricity donated for the six weeks they worked out of the building. They hoped to expand on what they were trying to do and build the board of directors. They also wanted to get an increase in advertising and increase fundraising and additional grants. They wanted to work with business and church donations as well. They were expecting an increase in the number of kids because of the COVID crisis. They were planning to provide as much as they possibly could for the community.

Chairman McMahan thanked them for what they were doing as they were having a positive impact on the children in the community.

Informational item.

(19) MOUNTAIN PROJECTS: Patsy Davis, Executive Director and Irv Welling were present (via Zoom video conferencing) for this item.

Ms. Davis thanked the Board for their support of Mountain Projects over the years and the agency programs they operated. Most of the requests they had were their standard requests, except for the Cashiers-Glenville Circles of Hope Program. Some of the programs had been hampered by COVID-19 and were on hold. The two federal programs the county offered the 10% match on for Senior Companions and Foster Grandparents were on hold as the stay at home order had been extended for volunteers until June 10th. If they did not continue those programs or the federal government stopped those programs, they would certainly not request the matching funds. Jackson Neighbors in Need would be more vital for the coming winter than ever before. It was their goal, when they reached the end of Phase 2 with the Governor, to start the GED Program back later in the summer.

Commissioner Woody asked about the senior citizens that were isolated and at a higher risk and could not have interactions face to face, were people following up with them as vulnerable citizens?

Ms. Davis stated that they continued to do things remotely. All of Mountain Project's services continued to be operational.

Mr. Welling stated that they started working on the Cashiers-Glenville Circles of Hope chapter two years ago and it had taken them a while to get organized, raise some money and get volunteers. This time last year they had a poverty simulation for the entire county that was well attended. There was a lot of poverty in Southern Jackson County. There were over 4,000 full time residents in the area with over 25% being below the Federal Poverty Standard, so there was a big need for this.

They joined Circles USA, which was a national program and used a model that had been in use for over 25 years. They had their first training session on February 1st with ten Learners. They only had four training sessions before they had to start social distancing. They had stayed in contact with the Learners each week and helped them if they had any needs.

They did have a Zoom check-in each week to maintain a connection with the Learners and had been building trust with them, which was a key component of the Circles model. They had received support from the Sylva Chapter as well. They had been great as a resource they could call on when they needed it. They were anticipating a date when they could get back together to start doing training.

Last year, they received a \$30,000 grant from the Highlands-Cashiers Foundation, but he did not believe they would receive this type of grant from them that year. They were very dependent on the \$15,000 they were requesting from the county.

Commissioner Woody stated that when Ms. Robeson came before the Board last year, they encouraged them to get started and see where they could go with this. Obviously they had done that. She thanked them for their work.

Informational item.

(20) SCHEDULE FOR MAY 29TH: Mr. Adams provided the Board with a schedule for the May 29th meeting. Also, regarding the information they had from Mr. Brown, he was not clear if he would receive any other funding, so the request would be for his full budget at that time.

Informational item.

There being no further business, Commissioner Mau moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Woody seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman