

**MINUTES OF A  
WORK SESSION  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
FEBRUARY 09, 2021**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on February 09, 2021, 1:00 p.m., at Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Brian McMahan, Chairman  
Boyce Deitz, Vice Chair  
Mark Jones, Commissioner  
Tom Stribling, Commissioner  
Gayle Woody, Commissioner

Don Adams, County Manager  
Heather C. Baker, County Attorney  
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board

Chairman McMahan called the meeting to order.

**(1) COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:** Rich Price, Economic Development Director was present for this item. Jessica Martin-Lane, Chief Strategy and Marketing Officer, Withers Ravenel and Dr. Arthur Salido, Director of Business Strategy and Economic Development, Withers Ravenel were present for this item via Zoom video conferencing.

Mr. Price stated that the process for the revisions of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was slated to begin early 2020, but because of Covid, they had to wait until they could do the exercise virtually for the appropriate input. They started the process with their partners at Withers Ravenel in August and September. They moved through the planning process with three filters in mind:

- CEDS that was adopted in 2012
- The Land Use Plan for 2040
- Stakeholder Input

The Business and Industry Committee had oversight of the project and was heavily involved throughout the process. He came to the Board on behalf of his office and the Business and Industry Committee with their unanimous and full recommendation for adoption of this plan, as presented.

These plans were fluid and would tend to be valid for five to seven years. Economic development and conditions were fluid and rapidly changing and evolving. The plan was a guiding document and subjective, so they could make changes, additions and vary the focus. It would need to be looked at often and revised when the Board and others working in economic development, agreed it needed to be done.

They made minor changes to a portion of the document relevant to the section of Goal 1, which referenced Tourism. He had provided Nick Breedlove, TDA Director, with a copy of the plan so they could use the document for a subcommittee for future reference. Mr. Breedlove and Robert Jumper, TDA Chair, expressed significant concerns about the way that section referenced goals and objectives. As they laid out objectives and action items in 2017, some items were assigned to Economic Development and some were assigned to Tourism Development.

TDA felt that the document gave the appearance of Economic Development having too much input into strategic plans developed by the TDA. They agreed to revise one section to demonstrate the significance of the relationship between Economic Development and Tourism Development as a critical component of the ongoing concern in economic development. This was reviewed by Business and Industry and TDA, with both of their approval. They were there to present a final presentation for the Board's consideration.

Ms. Martin-Lane thanked Mr. Price and all of the leaders at the county for allowing them to engage with the county and work on this important strategic initiative. It was a good process and she felt they had great input and output from the process.

Dr. Salido presented: Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy:

(a) Purpose: Jackson County's purpose in seeking an updated Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was to continue to improve the quality of life for its citizens by building a robust and healthy economy that was both diversified and sustainable.

(b) Project Information Gathered:

- Research
- Conversations
- Data collected through various in-person and electronic means
- Information derived from existing strategies

(c) Project Oversight:

- Approximately 30 business, government and regional/state leaders
- The Business and Industry Advisory Committee played an important oversight role throughout.

(d) Highlights:

- Project kickoff: August 4, 2020
- Assisted the county with organizing and convening focus groups. Met in October and participated in the online SWOT and Gap analyses.
- Throughout the project, conducted various working sessions with Mr. Price.
- Updated the Business and Industry Advisory Council on December 1, 2020 and preliminary review on February 2, 2021.
- Submitted a rough draft on December 10, 2020 and met with Mr. Price on December 14<sup>th</sup> for feedback.

(e) SWOT Analysis Feedback

(f) Research Information:

- Affordable Housing
- Population
- Industry Mix

(g) Recommendations: Goal 1: Maintain a robust and sustainable tourism destination:

- Regional tourism committee
- Lodging study – what, when, where
- Retail study
- Improve access to amenities/features

(h) Recommendations: Goal 2: Build a workforce that will meet the needs of current and future employers:

- Career education, readiness, exploration, starting in elementary school and continuing through adulthood.
- Employer facilitated childcare
- WCU and SCC – offer targeted certificates, credentials and training
- Create transit/ride sharing options

(i) Recommendations: Goal 3: Countywide high-speed broadband availability:

- WNC Broadband Project recommendations
- Digital Inclusion Committee
- Revolving Loan Fund

(j) Recommendations: Goal 4: Create a marketing campaign to support existing business and attract new business:

- Regional brand
- Regional supply chain study

- Refresh the OED website; updating buildings and sites
  - Revolving Loan Fund
  - Cluster focus groups
- (k) Recommendations: Goal 5: Identify investment opportunities to address current and future critical economic needs:
- Evaluate infrastructure to support targeted growth
  - Create a product development team
  - Invest in real estate that would match the supply chain
- (l) Recommendations: Goal 6: Commit to becoming an entrepreneurial and small business capital:
- Create an entrepreneurship/small business hub
  - Engage small business owners, chambers and stakeholders; make a plan to retain businesses
  - Coordinate with WCU and SCC
- (m) Recommendations: Goal 7: Maintain a comprehensive economic development strategy:
- Periodically review CEDS progress with county leaders and stakeholders
- (n) Recommendations: Goal 8: Maintain and enhance quality of life for citizens, tourists and small business owners:
- Coordinate and partner with municipalities
  - Expand awareness of citizen academy
- (o) Final Thoughts:
- Keep the CEDS and other strategy documents “open”. Through a five to seven-year plan, it should be revisited often
  - More county growth, challenges, opportunities
- (p) Acknowledgements:
- Mr. Price
  - County leaders and stakeholders
  - Business and Industry Committee
  - Ms. Martin-Lane
  - Jenny Mizelle, Business Development Representative, Withers Ravenel

Mr. Price stated this was a continuation of a road map. Work was ongoing with Economic Development and area partners working in collaboration. They felt the document provided proper vision and guidance for the focus to be on smartly growing in the county. It was with the recommendation of the Business and Industry Committee, for the Board to consider adoption of the CEDS, as presented.

Mr. Adams noted that the CEDS contained specific Action Initiatives along with the Lead Agency, Partners and Timeframes to be accomplished. There were a lot of good data in the document, but he wanted to lead them to the Action items, which he hoped everyone focused on if they had future questions.

Mr. Price stated that he would remain available to assist and stay engaged however he could.

General discussions were held.

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

(2) **DR. KILLIAN ROAD:** Michael Poston, Planning Director was present for this item. Chris Lee, District Engineer, NCDOT was present for this item via Zoom video conferencing.

Mr. Adams stated this item was previously discussed regarding the abandonment of a portion of Dr. Killian Road and adding it back.

Mr. Poston stated they first went over this item in the summer of 2020. This item came to the Board of Commissioners because of a state statute that required DOT to get a resolution from the county when they wanted to abandon a right of way. DOT received a request, as a part of the Millennial Apartment Complex, to relocate State Road 1331 Dr. Killian Road. The petitioner, WCU, requested that NCDOT abandon the old right of way and then establish maintenance on the new alignment of Dr. Killian Road. Mr. Lee requested that the county consider supporting a resolution that would abandon the old right of way and accept the new right of way into the state maintenance system.

Eventually, the decision would reside with the Board of Transportation at the state level, but they did require the resolution from the county. At the work session in the summer, the roadway had not been completed and was not approved by DOT to meet their basic minimum standards. He believed that Mr. Lee would state that had now been met and he requested that the county reconsider going forward with the resolution.

Mr. Lee stated this was a follow up to the request they had last summer to complete this transaction as this was a formal process they went through to relinquish the old right of way and establish a new right of way. They tabled it in the summer because of unfinished items such as pavement not being complete and the turnaround that was not complete. He had made a final inspection of remaining work on January 7<sup>th</sup> and found all items to be acceptable and in accordance with state standards and specifications.

Mr. Poston noted that one item that staff reviewed with these types of resolutions was whether or not ingress or egress was adversely impacted for property owners. They did complete that with DOT's review that the road would meet their standards. They believed, from a staff point of view, no ingress or egress would be negatively impacted by this request. The resolution stated that the Board supported the abandonment of the existing right of way and the acceptance of the new alignment into the state maintenance system.

General discussions were held.

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

**(3) ALL IN JACKSON FUND AND MOUNTAIN BIZ WORKS AGREEMENT:** Mr. Adams stated that he wanted to provide an update to the Board. The county set aside funds to be made available to businesses that had a need for revenues because of Covid.

He presented: All in Jackson Fund Update:

<b><u>Applications Summary</u></b>	<b><u>#</u></b>	<b><u>\$</u></b>
Total Applications	13	\$124,000
Underwriting	0	\$0
Approved/Funded	5	\$50,000
Lost/Declined	8	\$74,000
<b><u>Details on Approved and Funded Loans</u></b>		
Total Approved/Funded	5	\$50,000
Total Jobs Retained	29	
Number WBE/MBE	4	
<b><u>Closed Loans by Size/Number of Employees</u></b>		
1 to 5 Employees	3	60%
6 to 10 Employees	1	20%
11 to 20 Employees	1	20%
21 to 30 Employees	0	0%
More than 30 Employees	0	0%
Total	5	
<b><u>Funds Available</u></b>		
Total Fund Size	\$324,000	
Funds Available for Lending	\$274,000	

He would request to update the Agreement with Mountain Biz Works after they proceeded forward with the adoption of the CEDS and after they proceeded forward with the Economic Development Director position.

*Informational item.*

**(4) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR JOB DESCRIPTION:** Kathleen Breedlove, Human Resources Director was present for this item.

Mr. Adams provided the job description and a copy of the advertisement for the position. The initial conversation should revolve around the job description.

Commissioner Jones stated that in the previous CEDS item, Goal #4 of the Withers Ravenel report stated "Create a marketing campaign to support existing business and attract new business". He thought this should be a priority and he wanted to see that component in the job duties.

Chairman McMahan asked if the description of duties and responsibilities was broad enough that the person would understand they would be undertaking the work Commissioner Jones was talking about? Should they reference the CEDS and make moving forward with the implementation of it one of the objectives of the job?

Mr. Adams stated that he thought they could easily add that to the advertisement that they expected to follow through with the recently adopted 2021 CEDS. Once someone was hired, then there could be direction given that they wanted them to report back to the Board on their progress.

Commissioner Jones asked if the Board would be part of the hiring process?

Mr. Adams stated this position was appointed by the Board. The Board could take on the role of the interview process or there could be an interview team created after the applications were received. The interview team would consist of the stakeholders the department head would work with on a regular basis.

The Board could continue to discuss the process. Next steps would be to advertise the job and when they received the applications, they could then go into closed session to discuss what the process would be for the interviews.

General discussions were held.

Ms. Breedlove stated they would advertise through March 9<sup>th</sup> with interviewing to start around mid-March.

**Consensus:** *Add the objective to the job description of implementation of the CEDS.*

**(5) MEETING SCHEDULE:** Mr. Adams stated that as previously discussed, since the beginning of the pandemic, the courts had been utilizing the Commissioners' Board Room more often to hold sessions. There were several upcoming conflicts between court dates and regular scheduled Board of Commissioner meeting dates:

February 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.

March 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.

April 13<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.

April 20<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.

May 11<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.

May 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m.

There were several options available. Meetings could be held off-site at an alternative location or all meeting times could be moved to 6:00 p.m. on the dates of the conflicts.

General discussions were held.

**Consensus:** *Preliminarily move the meetings to 6:00 p.m. The County Manager to evaluate off-site alternate location options. Add this item to the next regular meeting agenda for consideration.*

**(6) JACKSON COUNTY'S NAME:** Ms. Baker stated that the Board previously requested that she do further research on how Jackson County was named and what it would take to go forward on the request from the Tribe with the resolution they presented.

She enlisted the help of Tracy Fitzmaurice, County Librarian and Ms. Buchanan, of the WCU Library. Everyone went back to the book "History of Jackson County" and they found the 1850-51 Session Law where Jackson County was created. The law itself mentioned nothing about how the name came about.

She found the Journal of the Senate and the Journal of the House of Commons, which were the minutes that were available online. From both, she found the sessions about the law being introduced. The Journals did not mention where the name came from, they just discussed the boundaries and went on to create the county. The bill was in a separate book of Session Laws.

As Chairman McMahan had pointed out, in the book "History of Jackson County", it talked about how the Town of Webster was formed as the County Seat and was named for Daniel Webster. The book did talk about the county being named for Andrew Jackson. This was suggested by the father of the first sheriff of Jackson County. This, however, was not in quotes and there was no resource given.

In the 1852 legislation, she found a supplemental bill for creating Jackson County. In the original bill, they failed to include information about how to create the court and other items. In 1852, they voted to repeal and amend the law with the supplemental law to include this information, which included creating the District of Webster as the County Seat.

She spoke with Kara Millonzi of the School of Government and she agreed with her assessment that there was really nothing in the Legislature they needed to do. It was up to the Board on how they wanted to move forward on that, so options were open.

The resolution that was presented to them from the Tribe had a section that stated: "*Be it further resolved, that the Tribe, through its Executive Branch Division, shall undertake the legal and cultural research necessary to give direction and effect to this intent.*" She had a meeting the next day with Members of the Executive Branch and Attorney General's Office to find out if they had different information than what she had collected.

Chairman McMahan stated that he appreciated all the work and research that Ms. Baker had done. He thought it was interesting that the resolution from Cherokee never really asked the Board to do anything.

Ms. Baker stated that it did not. It asked, through the intent, to change the name associated with Jackson County, but it did not direct that to the Board.

Chairman McMahan stated that it was not a resolution to the Jackson County Board of Commissioners asking them to do this.

Ms. Baker stated that was correct.

Chairman McMahan asked if Cherokee, as a Sovereign Nation, transmitted a copy of the resolution to the State Legislature? He thought they needed to know what steps they had taken asking for this action to take place.

Ms. Baker stated that she did not know, but would find out in her meeting.

Chairman McMahan stated that as a side note, there were a lot of names they had no clue where they came from. Many were from folklore or people saying what they were named for, but it may or may not have been. He did not have any doubt that they did not say Andrew Jackson and Daniel Webster, but he thought it was interesting that it was never recorded in the official record at the Legislature.

*Informational item.*

**(7) HERE IN JACKSON COUNTY:** Mr. Adams that he wanted to follow up on the request from the Chairman regarding HERE In Jackson County. He had a long conversation with Robert Cochran of HERE regarding what occurred from December to January with the program.

The county funded HERE with \$150,825 in the current fiscal year of 2020-2021. The primary purpose of the funding was for case management and the cold weather shelter. In the winter months, the primary goal was for no one to freeze to death in the community.

Due to available state funding, HERE was able to operate through the month of December without any limitations. Up until December, they had 44 rooms. For context, looking back at the Jackson Neighbors In Need era, they were dealing with 8–12 rooms during the winter months.

In the month of January, HERE reduced the number of available rooms to 19 with 15 for the cold weather shelter. They kept four as 30 day rooms for families in transition. 19 rooms over four months was a cost of \$148,200. HERE was going at a higher pace than the county's funding, which showed they were getting other funding.

HERE attempted to ensure that the people in the emergency shelter were people that were residents or had been in the county for some time. They constantly struggled with that as vetting was sometimes difficult. They all recognized that the hotel model was a regional draw for the transient population. In emergency situations, they may have to vet after the fact. A long term goal of HERE was a permanent shelter, which would remove the regional draw. HERE would be releasing a Request for Proposals for a feasibility study for a permanent homeless facility and a capital campaign.

HERE was starting to expand services to be multi-regional and would be administered on a regional basis. The programs would be based on Prevention Services and Rapid Rehousing. HERE received Rapid Rehousing and Prevention funds in the last calendar year. They currently applied for and were confident they would receive over \$380,000 for the regional services, which did not provide for hotel stays.

A portion of the programming they were applying for was coming from a Vaya Health Program called Back at Home Housing Program. This would transition some of their programs to regional programs and at some point, they had to relate that to what it meant for the emergency shelter.

There had been impacts on some of the other organizations in the community to help with rooms after January 1<sup>st</sup>, but at that point, they were trying to work through and had transitioned down to 19 rooms. They were hopeful to get through the winter season with the funding. When the funds and broader picture came together in a couple of months, he would request that HERE present to the Board about the regional concept, housing concept and the long-term strategy for a permanent shelter.

Commissioner Woody stated that she knew that HERE had been working really hard and she appreciated the information. They had conversations at United Christian Ministries about this because people would tend to come there and have to be funneled in whichever direction their needs were. Once the rooms were full, whether it be 19 or 44, there were still people. She encouraged the agencies to go back to HERE because they had the case management piece. Without that, it became problematic to help these people out of the cycle of homelessness.

Chairman McMahan stated he thought it was good news about the additional money for Rapid Rehousing as it helped deal with the issue at hand. He had brought the issue up because he had gotten a question about when the reduction in rooms took place. There was a belief that the money had run out and the county was no longer funding, which was not the case. He wanted to clarify that.

*Informational item.*

**(8) OTHER BUSINESS:** Chairman McMahan asked if the Health Department was working well with the move in?

Mr. Adams stated that everything was transitioned. They were still working through the punch list, but they needed to live in the building for a couple of months to identify any issues. As far as he was aware, the transition happened well and all were functioning well. Everyone was moved in.

Also, the facility they moved out of still had a lot of furniture in it. Evergreen Foundation did not have a lessor, so he was able to work with them. The county was not paying rent, only maintaining utilities. He was working with some nonprofits for the furniture.

Evergreen Foundation was a nonprofit entity that donated to other nonprofits in the community. Some of the rent the county paid to Evergreen was being distributed back through the communities. He was working to go through a disposal process with the furniture and try to benefit their nonprofit partners.

*Informational item.*

**(9) CLOSED SESSION:**

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Deitz moved that the Board go into closed session pursuant to G.S.143-318.11(a)(3) Legal and G.S.143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel. Commissioner Woody seconded the Motion. Motion carried.*

Chairman McMahan called the regular meeting back to order and stated that no action was taken in closed session.

There being no further business, Commissioner Woody moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman