

**MINUTES OF A
REGULAR MEETING
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
APRIL 06, 2021**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on April 06, 2021, 6:00 p.m., 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 Board

Chairman McMahan called the meeting to order.

(1) **AGENDA**: Commissioner Woody moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(2) **MINUTES**: Commissioner Jones moved to approve the minutes of a Special Called Budget Work Session of March 11, 2021 and a Regular Meeting of March 16, 2021, as presented. Commissioner Woody seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(3) **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**: None.

(4) **COMMISSIONER REPORTS**:

(a) Commissioner Stribling stated that he received an email from a citizen in Cashiers about the garbage pickup. She requested that the Commissioners review that issue.

Chairman McMahan stated that they would continue to debate that issue in the days ahead.

(b) Commissioner Woody stated that they were moving ahead with the Clean Sweep Litter Pickup, along with the state. It would start April 11th and go for two weeks. They had already received great participation from different entities within the county. They were pleased that citizens were stepping up and taking the effort seriously.

(5) **COUNTY MANAGER REPORT**: Mr. Adams reported:

(a) **Upcoming meetings**:

- Work Session April 13th at 1:00 p.m. - SCC Burrell Building
- Regular Meeting April 20th at 6:00 p.m. - Justice Center

(b) **Health Department Furniture**: Thanks to the good work of Darlene Fox, Selena Hall and Kerri Tucker, they had a successful giveaway of the old health department furniture. He provided the Board with a list of furniture and the county department or nonprofit entity that acquired the furniture for reuse.

(6) **INFORMAL COMMENTS BY THE PUBLIC**: None.

(7) ANNUAL EXTENSION REPORT: Rob Hawk, Extension Director, stated that since 1914 North Carolina Cooperative Extension helped people put research-based knowledge to work to improve quality of life. Educational program areas included: sustaining agriculture; commercial and residential horticulture and natural resources through conservation education, family and consumer education; 4-H youth development life skills; economic, community and rural development.

He presented the 2020 County Program Impact Report Executive Summary:

(a) Extension worked directly, face to face, with 5,050 people and indirectly, virtually through social media, phone or email with 30,780 people. Educational programs that consisted of more than one session over a period of days to months totaled 104 people for 350 hours and included: Social media; weekly newspaper articles; emails; phone calls; Zoom; field visits; classroom instruction; YouTube; publications; newsletters; and demonstrations.

(b) Some of the major extension educational programs included: Embryology; Ski-Walking; Meds vs. Meds Diet; Pumpkin and Squash School Project; 4-H STEM; Youth Leadership Council; Pasture Management; Cattle Chute Rental; Pesticide and Herbicide Training; and Plant Production.

(c) The 4-H Agent worked with 1,415 people, which increased leadership, civic and STEM skills. This was along with a massive effort to get 1,393 students in the county to grow a small garden through the Pumpkin and Squash School Project during the early stages of Covid-19 when schools closed during the spring.

(d) The Animal Agriculture Agent worked with 65 livestock producers that helped increase their pasture production, herd health and best beef management practice. They partnered with the Jackson, Macon and Swain Cattleman's Association monthly to disseminate educational programs. Also, they continued to help build a fledging 4-H Youth Livestock Club.

(e) The Consumer and Horticulture program aided 1,927 private growers with increasing home gardens. Also, they helped approximately 24 commercial producers through plant and pest disease and soil deficiencies with proper soil testing and best plant production practices.

(f) The Family and Consumer Science Agent helped 418 citizens increase their nutrition with cooking and healthy eating habit educational programs. These programs included: Meds instead of Meds, which taught cooking for a healthy Mediterranean diet. They worked with daycares and schools on parenting skills. Also, they taught eight citizens financial literacy skills.

(g) The Extension Director worked with 79 private landowners on best management practices for wildlife nuisances, such as problems with: snakes, squirrels, bears, groundhogs, bats, beavers, skunks, raccoons and insects. They supported four active Community Development Clubs with the annual awards program. They distributed 100 Norway Spruce seedlings to honor veterans on Veteran's Day.

(h) Volunteers were the lifeline of any successful Extension Program. Over the course of the year, 126 volunteers donated 938 hours for a total economic impact of \$23,854 that benefited 2,513 individuals in the county.

(i) The Extension helped to raise \$7,450 for educational program materials. \$6,000 helped with resource development for two agribusinesses through the WNC AgOptions Grant Program funded by the Tobacco Trust Fund Commission Grant.

Chairman McMahan stated that as he had said many times before, he could not say enough good about Cooperative Extension and all the work they did. It was a vital service in the county with their outreach.

Informational item.

(8) FIRE TAX SURVEY: Todd Dillard, Emergency Management Director and Michael Forbis, Fire Marshal, were present via Zoom video conferencing.

Chairman McMahan stated that as part of the Board's discussions about trying to figure out ways to meet the requests that had been brought before them. The Board had requested more research on this item.

Mr. Adams stated that this was a follow up on questions from the Board. He requested that Mr. Dillard and Mr. Forbis do further research. Also, this topic would be on the next work session agenda on April 13th. At that point, they would be able to bring back more specific information on an updated budget from Cullowhee Volunteer Fire Department, monies left over that could be utilized by the remaining five departments and concepts related to the direction the Board gave staff regarding a service tax or a general tax.

Mr. Dillard stated he requested that Mr. Forbis contact the surrounding counties on the different formats used for fire tax.

Mr. Forbis presented:

(a) Transylvania County (9 departments): In the past, each fire district had its own fire tax set to the specific need of that department. Some departments had a 4.5 cent per 100 tax, whereas others had 15 cents per 100 tax. Even though they had a countywide property evaluation of equal size, type and condition, a homeowner that had a property evaluation of \$250,000 living in the 4.5-cent district was paying much less, for fire protection compared to the same property evaluation of the same \$250,000 home in the 15 cent district.

The commissioners would review each department's budget request and approve a budget (which may or may not be what they submitted due to needs versus wants). The commissioners then set each fire department district countywide at a percentage, say 5.5 cents per 100. They would calculate what each district would bring in based on that 5.5 cents and if it was not enough to cover it, they pulled the remainder from the general fund, which was adjusted to cover that need. All fire districts were considered Response Districts. Transylvania was considering changing Service Districts so they could adjust the respective response areas for faster/better response.

The "flat fee" countywide was based on the following analysis: Every department utilized mutual/automatic aid for fires and to gain a lower NC DOI Protection Classification. For example, the 15 cent fire district was constantly sending equipment to the 4.5 cent district to help protect and extinguish the high value homes. The citizens of that 15 cent district were paying a higher cost for fire protection just to cover their district and paying their fire department to help protect the high value homes free. The 4.5 cent district was paying much less for fire protection already and getting free help. Departments helped each other all the time, which was natural within emergency services. However, they felt it was unfair to the homeowners paying sometimes double or triple the cost from a 4.5 to a 16 cent per 100.

Transylvania Emergency Services looked at a fire district flat tax across the board naturally, the fire departments resisted. Commissioners set each fire district to a set number across the board and funded the remainder from the general fund, which was increased to cover expenditures and capital purchases for fire protection. Ultimately, it was a countywide flat tax/fee, but not called a "flat tax".

(b) Macon County (11 departments): Macon County had Fire Service Districts with service fees ranging from 3 cents to 12.7 cents. Each department submitted an annual budget worksheet for the fiscal year to the county, which was reviewed and approved by the commissioners. If the departments had expenditures or capital purchases that exceed the current rate, they would have to go before the board with justification to receive approval.

(c) Haywood County (17 departments): Haywood County had seven departments with Fire Districts, seven departments with Fire Service Districts and three departments with Service Districts. The fees ranged from 5 cents to 10 cents (the county had a 10 cent cap for fire tax). Each department submitted an annual budget to their respective districts in the form of a community meeting. Once the community meeting was completed, the budget was sent to the commissioners for approval. If the departments had expenditures or capital purchases that would exceed the current rate, they would have to go before the board

with justification. The commissioners then had the option to raise the rate that year to assist with these purchases.

Mr. Dillard presented: Fire Department Call Types:

(d) Balsam:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire</u>	<u>1st Responder</u>	<u>Total</u>
2016	195	64	259
2017	196	64	260
2018	187	71	258
2019	179	78	257
2020	125	47	172

(e) Canada:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire</u>	<u>1st Responder</u>	<u>Total</u>
2016	84	38	122
2017	74	39	113
2018	74	54	108
2019	54	34	88
2020	39	36	75

(f) Cashiers: Fire Department does no 1st Responder calls.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire</u>
2016	577
2017	656
2018	515
2019	545
2020	608

(g) Cullowhee:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire</u>	<u>1st Responder</u>	<u>Total</u>
2016	577	211	788
2017	585	207	792
2018	601	203	804
2019	558	199	757
2020	473	73	546

(h) Qualla:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire</u>	<u>1st Responder</u>	<u>Total</u>
2016	279	289	568
2017	261	302	563
2018	305	335	640
2019	308	327	635
2020	297	214	511

(i) Savannah:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire</u>	<u>1st Responder</u>	<u>Total</u>
2016	225	235	460
2017	200	134	334
2018	188	155	343
2019	119	162	281
2020	171	81	252

(j) Sylva:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fire</u>	<u>1st Responder</u>	<u>Total</u>
2016	514	346	860
2017	476	348	824
2018	445	325	770
2019	504	351	855
2020	486	265	751

Mr. Dillard stated that in 2020, due to Covid, calls were down substantially, especially the first responder calls because the fire departments elected not to do first responder calls, except for certain emergencies.

Chairman McMahan stated that he thought it was important to note that not only did the departments in the county decided not to respond to first responder calls because of the potential they may come in contact with Covid related cases, but also, there were a lot of citizens that did not call for an ambulance. They were so afraid to go to a hospital facility and potentially come in contact with Covid, they avoided calling 911.

Mr. Adams stated that if Cullowhee did become a full-time fire department and the Board chose to raise general taxes to fund that, there would be funds remaining in the fire budget that could be available to disperse to the other fire departments, if the Board chose to do so. That followed up with the concept of additional resources that the other five departments could utilize to help their service. There would be various ways to have that conversation. He encouraged the Board to review the information provided before the work session.

Commissioner Jones requested information at the work session regarding why the fire calls were down also from Mr. Dillard.

Mr. Adams stated that the last conversation the Board had was there was no desire to move forward with a service tax for the Cullowhee area, in terms of 10 to 12 cents. Taking that feedback from the Board, they would present how they would fund the Cullowhee Fire Department costs with a general tax across the board. They believed they would be able to present a proposal that would keep the tax increase to about 1 cent. It was a significant difference between countywide taxation versus a service tax. The Board would be given several options that would coincide with their desires.

Commissioner Woody stated that it would be important to communicate clearly how the money would be distributed and where it was going so there was a clear understanding and transparency, as far as the process.

Mr. Adams stated that initially, there would not be a recommendation to change the Cashiers Fire Tax. The discussions would be to follow through with Chief Randy Dillard's request with the fire tax in Cashiers and then treat everything else separately.

Informational item.

(9) AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY BOARD:

Motion: Commissioner Jones moved to appoint Frank Burrell to serve a three-year term on the Council on Aging, term expiring June 1, 2023. Commissioner Woody seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

(10) BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Motion: Commissioner Deitz moved to reappoint Larry Hinton and John Bubacz to serve additional terms on the Business and Industry Advisory Board, terms expiring April 15, 2024. Chairman McMahan seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

(11) TRANSIT ADVISORY BOARD:

Motion: *Commissioner Deitz moved to appoint Bruce Moore to serve an unexpired term on the Transit Advisory Board, term expiring June 30, 2023. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(12) PRESS CONFERENCE: None.

There being no further business, Commissioner Stribling moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Deitz seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman