

**MINUTES OF A
REGULAR MEETING
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
AUGUST 03, 2021**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on August 03, 2021, 6:00 p.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
	Mark Jones, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board
	Tom Stribling, Commissioner	
	Gayle Woody, Commissioner	

Chairman McMahan called the meeting to order.

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

(2) **MINUTES**: Commissioner Stribling moved to approve the minutes of a Work Session of July 13, 2021; a Public Hearing (Agricultural District Ordinance Amendment) of July 20, 2021; and a Regular Meeting of July 20, 2021, as presented. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(3) **CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**: None.

(4) **COMMISSIONER REPORTS**:

(a) Commissioner Stribling thanked Sheriff Hall for the excellent work he and all of the deputies had done the past few weeks. They had been working diligently on cleaning up some bad areas and he wanted to commend them on their service.

(b) Commissioner Jones stated that last Tuesday, after the Southwestern Community College Trustee meeting, they received a tour of the new Health Sciences Building. It was amazing with the technology and what they would be able to do with the program. It was a phenomenal facility.

(c) Commissioner Woody stated that she and Commissioner Deitz attended the dedication of the Beloved Man, Dr. Jerry Wolfe Memorial Highway. It was a great coming together of Jackson County, Swain County and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, as the highway went through all three entities. It was a wonderful celebration of a person that had impacted the communities in a very positive way.

Also, she had the honor of serving District 17, which was the seven western counties and she was elected to serve again on the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. It was an honor and a privilege to do so.

(5) **COUNTY MANAGER REPORT**: Mr. Adams stated that he had no formal report, but he wanted to share the Governor press release and announcements regarding new CDC Guidelines. Transmission rates had increased in the state and the entire nation in the past month. In response, the CDC issued new guidance that recommended that all persons indoors and in public spaces wear masks. It was recommended to wear masks in areas where transmissions were “orange” and “red” on the CDC website data tracker. At that time, Jackson County was in “red” or high level of community transmission.

Also, there was additional guidance from the CDC and the Governor was moving forward with requiring employees to report vaccination status. They recommended that employees that were not fully vaccinated to be required to wear face coverings indoors, maintain physical distancing from others and get tested regularly. Governor Cooper implemented this for all state employees that fell under his direct control. This information was provided to all county departments. It was recommended that all county employees wear a mask indoors in public spaces. At that point, it was not recommended or required to wear masks in personal work spaces.

Commissioner Deitz asked if they knew how many county employees had been vaccinated?

Mr. Adams stated he did not have an official count. He could not legally access that information from the Health Department because of HIPAA Regulations.

Chairman McMahan stated that this was something that they all had taken very serious over the last year and a half and continued to take it serious. He thought it was a good example for the Commissioners to personally demonstrate to their coworkers, friends, community members and citizens at large, that they felt people needed to continue to practice safety measures and encouraged people to get vaccinated.

Mr. Adams stated they had started seeing people who were vaccinated become infected. If that continued and they saw a higher increase of that happening, it would force them to revert back to some of the earlier policies. The only two ways to stop this from occurring would be to become vaccinated or to continue practicing the three W's.

(6) INFORMAL COMMENTS BY THE PUBLIC: None.

(7) OFFER TO PURCHASE AND CONTRACT FROM AGREVIVE, INC. AND RESOLUTION R21-26: Ms. Baker presented an offer she received from AGREVIVE, Inc. for approximately 0.31 acres, Dicks Creek Road/Former Dumpster Site (PIN #7622-74-1152) in the amount of \$1,119.92. The county became the owner of the property in 1990 and it stopped being used as a dump site prior to 2014.

Mr. Adams stated that he was familiar with this site and he and Chad Parker, Public Works Director, had looked at. He requested to delay any action on this property.

Item tabled.

(8) OFFER TO PURCHASE AND CONTRACT FROM AGREVIVE, INC. AND RESOLUTION R21-27: Ms. Baker presented an offer she received from AGREVIVE, Inc. for approximately 1.25 acres, Lot 636, Phase 2, Bear Lake Reserve (PIN #7585-89-7277) in the amount of \$15,842.00. The county recently foreclosed on this property and the offer was for the full cost of what the county had in it at that point.

If the Board accepted the offer, it would go to an upset bid process. They would advertise in the newspaper and anyone would have the opportunity, for ten days, to upset the offer. Also, they would send out letters to notify surrounding property owners.

Chairman McMahan asked if this lot was originally created for residential purpose?

Ms. Baker stated that this was a residential lot.

Chairman McMahan stated that in some private communities there were HOA fees and they had previously discussed the county's responsibility to pay HOA fees. Were there fees on this one?

Ms. Baker stated there were HOA fees and the county had already been contacted by the Association. She let them know that the county would not participate at that time.

Mr. Adams stated that the county had taken a particular legal stance regarding the county's obligation to those fees.

General discussions were held.

Motion: *Commissioner Deitz moved to approve Resolutions R21-27, as presented. Commissioner Woody seconded the Motion. Motion carried by a vote of 4-1, with Commissioner Stribling voting “nay”.*

(9) REGISTER OF DEEDS REFUND: Ms. Baker stated that this was a request for a refund for excess revenue stamps paid to the Register of Deeds. There was an error on the deed where they listed \$414.00 in revenue when it should have been \$64.00. The request was for a refund of \$350.00. They had complied with the law by filing a corrective deed and making written request to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

She also noted that there was pending legislation to make this an easier process to give the Board the option of delegating these refunds to the Finance Officer or the County Manager. The legislation passed the house and did make crossover, but had not been taken up in the senate yet.

Motion: *Commissioner Woody moved to approve the refund in the amount of \$350.00, as requested. Commissioner Deitz seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(10) DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST GRANT OPPORTUNITY: Wesley Myers, Executive Director for Center for Domestic Peace and Robert Cochran, Executive Director of HERE in Jackson County were present for this item.

Mr. Adams stated that Dogwood Trust requested proposals from counties, municipalities and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, who wanted to leverage the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that they were investing in affordable housing. ARPA Advantage grants would provide a total of \$10 million to support collaborative projects between counties, municipalities or tribal nations and 501(c)(3) organizations that leverage ARPA funds to promote affordable housing in Western North Carolina. They were particularly interested in projects that would draw additional funding from sources beyond the ARPA funds and in collaboratives that included multiple partner organizations.

(a) The purpose was to capitalize on ARPA funds by increasing investments in affordable housing in the region.

(b) They would consider grants ranging from \$500,000 to \$2.5 million. ARPA Advantage grants were available for affordable housing projects that were consistent with 501(c)(3) guidelines. Requests could include:

- Predevelopment
 - Infrastructure
 - Construction costs
 - Land acquisition
 - Capacity building
- (c)** Priority would be given to proposals that promoted:
- Creation of new or rehabilitation of existing structures to help preserve natural resources and landscape.
 - Supportive housing, permanent or transitional, for at least one of the following:
 - Persons with mental, physical or development disabilities.
 - Domestic abuse survivors.
 - Children aging out of foster care.
 - Persons being released from incarceration.
 - Development or rehabilitation of housing designed to revitalize a blighted area in a way that mitigates displacement or gentrification.

There were two programs that had been working for multiple years to develop housing opportunities for domestic violence survivors and for the homeless program. Specifically, he was speaking about the Center for Domestic Peace (CDP) and the HERE Program. In the past couple of weeks, they had partnered with Southwestern Commission Council of Governments to help them to start putting together potential grant applications. They had been working directly with CDP and HERE about future needs and shelters.

Months ago, when he provided information to the Board regarding ARPA funds, they had received information from the federal government that if counties chose to use funds for human services purposes, that would automatically be associated with Covid-19. It would be assumed that mental health issues and substance abuse issues would be heightened or exacerbated by Covid-19. With the opportunity from Dogwood Health Trust, they believed this was an opportunity for the county to partner with Dogwood Health, CDP and HERE to make significant strides towards the build out of those two types of shelters.

He invited Mr. Myers and Mr. Cochran to present summaries to the Board that would be in the grant applications, which was due August 16th. If the Board wished to proceed with this item, he requested that the Board recess the meeting until August 10th, which would be when they would be able to come back to the Board with more details regarding the physical shelters. They were not prepared to speak about the locations and specific details of the shelters that day in a public forum. On August 10th, they would be prepared to have a public conversation.

Chairman McMahan stated that to recap, this would be a high level view of grant potential, what was available, hear from two service providers in the community and how this may be an advantage to their organizations. They would go into closed session to discuss other details that were not privy to the public at that point. If this continued to move forward toward the application, on August 10th, they would provide the full details. To make sure the Board was interested in moving in those directions and to review sensitive information, they would need to go into closed session to discuss the concrete details.

(d) Center for Domestic Peace: Mr. Myers stated that CDP was a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and the primary domestic violence services provider (DVSP) in Jackson County. Their mission was to end interpersonal violence in the community through prevention, intervention and educational services. Their clients, primary and secondary victims of interpersonal violence, primarily would seek them out for intervention services: crisis counseling, court advocacy, counseling referrals, transportation coordination, emergency housing coordination, job and financial skill building and many other resources. All services were provided free of charge and without discrimination. They did not operate a brick and mortar shelter, instead they utilized a surrounding agency referral or hotel stay model.

From July 2020 to June 2021, CDP served 237 unique clients, providing 3,225 service hours for their clients' benefit. They also provided more than 50 outreach events to various community organizations. CDP was able to create a safe atmosphere for all clients due to the diversity of their staff. They were proud to have been able to provide services to so many residents and be able to assist so many historically underserved populations that often chose not to seek services due to lack of access or fear of further victimization.

Building a domestic violence survivors shelter was imperative not only for the continued success of the program, but also for the safety of survivors who regularly must stay in the home with their abuser. This statement could be supported in three ways. First, the out-of-county referral and hotel model being used was financially unsustainable both for CDP and for the surrounding county agencies that must bear the costs to house, feed and provide case management.

A qualitative analysis of the crisis call records indicated that victims who elected to stay with their abuser often did so because they did not feel a hotel was safe enough or a viable long-term option for them or their children. Finally, CDP estimated that they would have 50 clients stay annually for a total of 1,145 bed nights. They anticipated that utilization would actually be higher than the estimate as many potential clients may not call them currently knowing they did not have a shelter.

CDP had many important factors that supported its stability both financially and among its leadership. Their budget was 58% from non-competitive grant sources with little to no indication to ever be withdrawn. These funds would be further increased by non-competitive and competitive grant monies to fully staff and maintain the shelter. The CDP Board of Directors participated in a fundraising development training that increased their ability to fundraise without large and expensive events.

The board also consisted of numerous seasoned leaders, both from the nonprofit sector in addition to corporate and government leaders. The Executive Director came to the organization with five years of federal grant writing and management experience, as well as an extensive history in the study of vulnerable victims and their safety. CDP added three additional programs and nearly tripled its staff size in a year and a half. The continued growth was sustainable because of ongoing work by its leadership.

(e) **HERE of Jackson County**: Mr. Cochran stated that HERE was the primary respondent to Jackson County's request for proposals in 2019. The county had a long interest in addressing the needs of the less fortunate and homeless. HERE was selected by the county for those services. The two primary goals of HERE were to keep anyone from freezing to death during the cold winter months and to help them transition to permanent housing.

He presented: ARPA Advantage HERE grant application input:

- Grant Outputs:
 - Transition from a hotel model to a permanent brick and mortar homeless shelter in the county.
 - Development of a homeless shelter with 12 safe, secure and supportive individual quarters for 12 to 30 individuals, couples and families, as well as overflow congregant shelter space o freezing nights to accommodate an additional 16 individuals.
- Grant Outcomes:
 - Participants to be served: It was anticipated the shelter would serve approximately the same number that HERE served in FY20-21, which was 144 unique individuals (103 adults and 41 children).
 - Units of service:
 - An estimated 8,760 (12 rooms x 2.5 occupants x 292 days) individual nights of shelter would be provided each year. The figure anticipated an 80% average occupancy rate each year.
 - Approximately 18,000 meals would be provided per year.
 - Approximately 52 households (130 individuals) would transition from literal homelessness to permanent, safe, affordable housing.
 - Tenancy 101 classes, behavioral and medical health services, family coaching, GED classes, Human Resources Development classes and other supportive services would be provided in the shelter throughout the week.
 - This would be a low-barrier homeless shelter that would not screen persons out because of drug use, mental illness, gender identification, marital status or other characteristics unless they represented an imminent threat to themselves or others.
 - This would also be a "housing first" shelter, meaning all activities would be geared toward helping individuals and families transition as quickly as possible into permanent, safe, affordable housing, regardless of other challenges they may be facing such as mental illness, substance use disorder, unemployment, etc.
- Partners:
 - Meridian Behavioral Health
 - Community Table
 - Mountain Projects

- Rolling Start
- Habitat for Humanity
- Equity, capital and other funding:
 - HERE: Housing Equity, Resources and Education. HERE met immediate needs by providing emergency homeless shelter, but HERE’s long term goal with every individual and family was to help them transition from literal homelessness to permanent, safe, affordable housing as quickly as possible.
 - Because HERE was a small nonprofit with only five staff members, additional administrative support while the project was developed would be very helpful. Work with architects, builders and others involved in the creation of a permanent homeless shelter would take significant time, energy and focus by the Executive Director. This could negatively impact the current day to day operations unless additional staffing was arranged.

General discussions were held.

Mr. Adams stated that if they were able to move forward and have significant resources available, that would allow them to immediately go into architectural and programming design. If they were successful in this grant, which was fairly quick, they would spend the next six to eight months going through the design and programming. He thought it was important to know that this was a very fast timeline, but they had multiple years with these grant dollars and with ARPA monies to plan it out. The nonprofits were always in conversation about finding additional funding to run their programs. The best case scenario would be they were two to three years out from having the doors open.

Carry over.

(11) BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Motion: *Commissioner Jones moved to appoint Marne Harris to serve an unexpired term on the Business and Industry Advisory Board, term expiring December 31, 2022. Commissioner Woody seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(12) PRESS CONFERENCE: None.

(13) CLOSED SESSION:

Motion: *Commissioner Jones moved that the Board go into closed session pursuant to G.S.143-318.11(a)(5) Real Property. 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 except the approval of the minutes.

There being no further business, Commissioner Deitz moved to recess the meeting until August 10, 2021 at 12:55 p.m. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting recessed at 8:18 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman