

**MINUTES OF A  
PUBLIC HEARING  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
OCTOBER 03, 2023**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners held a Public Hearing on October 03, 2023, at 5:45 p.m., Justice & Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Mark A. Letson, Chairman  
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair  
Mark Jones, Commissioner  
John W. Smith, Commissioner  
Tom Stribling, Commissioner

Don Adams, County Manager  
Debra Bechtel, Interim County Attorney (Via Zoom)  
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board

Chairman Letson called the public hearing to order and stated the purpose of the Public Hearing was to receive public input concerning the Board of Commissioners' consideration of exercising its' authority over commissions, boards, agencies, etc. in accordance with NCGS § 153A-77.

More specifically, the Board of Commissioners was considering multiple options to include, but not limited to, the abolishment of the existing Board of Health and Board of Social Services and/or the creation of a Consolidated Human Services Agency and/or the Board of Commissioners exercising the authority to assume all powers, responsibilities and duties of the Consolidated Human Services Board and/or the Board of Commissioners exercising the authority to assume all powers, responsibilities and duties of the Board of Social Services and the Board of Health.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

(a) Jerry DeWeese stated he served on the Board of Health for 20 years, including when the boards were consolidated in 2018. Consolidation worked in counties where the two departments were collocated. The county spent millions of dollars building and remodeling two buildings on opposite sides of town for these two departments. He recommended to let the two boards continue to function independently and effectively. Politics should never interfere with people's health.

(b) Christine Taber stated she had never heard a complaint about the Health Department, so why were they there. No one had identified a gain in efficiency or effectiveness or how reorganization would affect residents of the county. The reorganization should be tabled permanently.

(c) Tom Downing disagreed with a 15-minute public hearing for this issue. They were talking about real life people in these departments that made up 30% of the county budget. They were perpetrating a stain on the county, the commission and the people who used these departments.

(d) Karl Nicolas stated he lived in Sylva over 60 years and his departed wife served for ten years on this commission. The consolidation proposal contained the prospect of adding a new position of a CHS Director to oversee the health and human services department with a salary higher than the two subordinate directors. Consolidation was not in the best interest of the county.

(e) Susan Bogardus asked what the benefit was for consolidation. Was there any proof consolidation would improve services? If that was true, she was for it because she thought many things would be helpful. How many commissioners were DSS or public health experts? What specific problems in those departments could be solved by consolidation?

(f) Burgin Mackey stated she studied public health at WCU and was a recent graduate. She did not want republicans or democrats involved or in charge of health services. It was best to keep these services with folks that spent their lives and careers in public health and social services. There were no benefits of consolidation seen and until those benefits were made plain, she urged Commissioners to vote against consolidation.

(g) David McGuire stated he had been a dentist in the county 41 years and had been on the Health Board almost as long. He was part of the board the last time this was done. At that hearing, around 20 people spoke against with one speaking for consolidation. As soon as the hearing was finished, the Board immediately voted to go against the majority. He encouraged them to listen this time.

(h) Kyle Clayton stated he was a new Health Board member. This had already been attempted and failed, so why attempt this again? Would this provide better benefits, pay or training for the employees? He urged them not to consider this.

(i) Stephen Anfinson stated he was recently appointed to the DSS Board and had a 40+ year career in the human services field. He urged the board to review why the effort previously fell apart. They should consult with the existing boards, the directors and get input from county employees. They should identify the problems they were trying to solve and develop a plan of action with a cost benefit analysis.

(j) Dana Tucker stated she was the Chair of the Department of Social Services Board and had worked with the less fortunate in the county for 31 years. Leaders of the county had a fiduciary duty and responsibility in the community to be transparent. Changing the leadership structure of these two vital public service agencies, without divulging the full scope of the plan to dissolve the two sitting boards, gave rise to questions of motives and political agendas.

(k) Boyce Deitz stated he appreciated the Commissioners and what they were doing. When they got started in this situation when he was a Commissioner, they had a workshop where this was introduced to the Commissioners saying there was a lot of people that wanted to see this done. No one ever asked him when they were going to consolidate those two departments. Looking at the two boards, it was awesome to get people of that caliber to serve. He did not see a reason to consolidate. He hoped they looked at this strong and listened to the people that spoke.

(l) Alice Marie Pendergrast read a letter from Gayle Woody. In the letter, Ms. Woody stated her opposition to the consolidation of the Health Board and the Department of Social Services Board and provided her reasons for her opinion.

(m) Terrie Cole-Smith stated in newspaper articles, there were zero reasons given for the benefit of consolidation. She could not find anything from any of the Commissioners on why this would be a good idea. This would take a long time, be complicated and take a lot of money. It would be a lot of time and knowledge for the Commissioners also.

(n) Natalie Newman stated instead of focusing on consolidation, they should take time to look into what it would take to get a mental health and substance abuse facility in the county, as well as a homeless shelter to address the homelessness in the community.

(o) Charles Wolfe stated he was a member of the Department of Social Services Board and was a member of the Consolidated Board for the short time it existed. He was opposed to the consolidation of these boards because at that point, he had not seen anything that showed how this was going to benefit these agencies or the people in the communities they served. He had great admiration for what the Health Department and DSS did for the citizens.

There being no further public comments, Commissioner Stribling moved that the public hearing be adjourned at 6:34 p.m. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Attest:

Approved:

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Angela M. Winchester, Clerk

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Mark A. Letson, Chairman