

**MINUTES OF A  
REGULAR MEETING  
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
HELD ON  
DECEMBER 19, 2023**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on December 19, 2023, 6:30 p.m., Justice and 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  
John Kubis, Interim County Attorney  
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) **AGENDA**: Chairman Letson requested to remove one item: Fontana Regional Library Agreement. Commissioner Jones moved to approve the amended agenda. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(2) **MINUTES**: Commissioner Bryson moved to approve the minutes of a Regular Meeting of December 05, 2023. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(3) **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**: Chairman Letson thanked the Sheriff's Office, Police Department, EMS, Fire Departments and Rescue Squad for their service and staying on duty during the busy holidays.

(4) **COMMISSIONER REPORTS**: Commissioner Bryson stated whoever did the project at Chipper Curve/Bryson Park did an outstanding job and did it quickly. He thanked County Manager Adams for all he had done and for his service. He wished everyone a merry Christmas.

(5) **COUNTY MANAGER REPORT**: Mr. Adams stated this was his last manager report. He had been in local government for over 29 years in both full-time and part-time capacities. He had been a County Manager for 26.5 years with the last seven years, five months with Jackson County. His career had been a life of service. He was proud of the partnerships built and works accomplished over the span of his career. He shared accomplishments and goals met over the past seven years in the county.

He had worked for four different boards, equating to 12 different commissioners in the last seven years and he extended his appreciation to them all. He enjoyed working with elected officials and other leadership to improve the community. It took a team to accomplish things. The teamwork started with the elected officials and then required leadership from administration and other departments. Administration included the County Manager, County Attorney, Finance Officer, Human Resources, Clerk to the Board and the Assistant to the Manager.

He stated based on the history of this county, he was confident the Board and future leadership would make the right choices for the community. They were in a great position to positively impact the community on a generational scale. It had been his honor and privilege to serve the citizens of Jackson County.

Chairman Letson stated they were in a great position to succeed and a lot of that was thanks to Mr. Adams.

Commissioner Stribling thanked Mr. Adams for everything he had done. He did a great job.

**(6) INFORMAL COMMENTS BY THE PUBLIC:**

(a) Jim Gaston stated he was a long-time supporter of local libraries and used them frequently. His wife was a Library Board Member within the Fontana Regional Library (FRL). Since the FRL changed course and attempted to silence patrons, he had been actively involved in this issue. There was no consistency in FRL operations and things were decided unilaterally behind closed doors. He encouraged the Board to support the amendments to the agreement.

(b) Bodie Catlin stated he attended the March 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the FRL Board, but was not allowed to speak. The Board followed the directives published in a video by the American Library Association (ALA). Several states recently cut ties with ALA. The Macon County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the revised contract with FRL. He urged the Board to approve the revised contract unanimously to move it to Swain County for consideration.

(c) Diane Catlin stated they had not been treated with respect from the FRL as their ability to speak was taken away. FRL engaged a pro bono constitutional lawyer, whose first act was to cancel their speech. They had a problem with sexually explicit books in the children’s department. They had never asked to ban one book. They only ask to move the book to the adult section. She requested the Board consider the revisions to the contract.

(d) Robert Thomas requested to know the status of the leases and the future plans for three commercial buildings owned by the county: Clearwood Lumber Yard property in Whitter; the Buster Brown Plant; and the Silco Plant/Tuckaseigee Mills. Also, he was concerned about the intersection of Highway 116 and 107. A lot of students crossed the road to the high school. He had proposed a walk bridge in that area for pedestrians to DOT.

(e) Keith Blaine stated he supported moving the Board of Education elections to the General Election in November. Last year in the county, 15,094 people voted in the General Election and 7,246 people voted in the Primary. Moving the election to November would provide better representation and more transparency. Also, the FRL agreement was unanimously passed by the Macon County Board of Commissioners. He supported all of the amendments to the agreement.

**(7) CONSENT AGENDA:**

(a) Darlene Fox, Finance Director, presented the Finance Report for November, 2023 for approval.

(b) Brandi Henson, Tax Collector, presented the Tax Collector and Refund Reports for November, 2023, for approval.

***Motion:*** Commissioner Jones moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

**(8) SYLVA LICENSE PLATE AGENCY:** Tabitha Ashe, Tax Administrator, stated this was a continued discussion they had been having for several months. At the work session, the Board requested provide information based on hiring two employees:

(a) Annual Financial Estimate:

Transaction Fees	\$110,289.01
Notary Fees	\$40,000.00
Total Revenue	\$150,289.01
Expenses	\$117,537.02
Profit	\$32,751.99

- Expenses included salaries for two full-time positions, plus \$2,500 office supplies.
- The salaries could increase if the applicants have experience. The county Pay Policy permitted new hires to receive direct experience in certain situations.

(b) Annual Financial Estimate with Experience:

Transaction Fees	\$110,289.01
Notary Fees	\$40,000.00
Total Revenue	\$150,289.01
Expenses	\$144,794.25
Profit	\$5,494.76

- Expenses included salaries for two full-time positions, plus \$2,500 office supplies.
- Applying ten years of experience to each position.

General discussions were held.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Stribling moved to proceed forward with the contract for a License Plate Agency, two new positions and potential costs to construct the necessary space at Skyland Services Center, as requested. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(9) **CENTER FOR DOMESTIC PEACE MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT:**

Mr. Adams stated this item was discussed at the work session. He presented a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Center for Domestic Peace for consideration. There was a potential for a grant from the Cannon Foundation, Inc in the amount of \$250,000. The Cannon Foundation requested a commitment from the Board of Commissioners that this property would be used for a Domestic Violence Shelter.

The MOA stated the county's intention to lease the property to the Center for Domestic Peace for ten years. He requested the Board consider the MOA so it could be provided to The Cannon Foundation as the last piece requested to consider approval of the \$250,000 grant.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Jones moved to approve the Center for Domestic Peace Memorandum of Agreement, as presented. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(10) **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SHELTER:** Mr. Adams presented a new bidding schedule from the architect for the Domestic Violence Shelter:

- Advertise January 15<sup>th</sup>
- Bids due February 15<sup>th</sup>
- 45 days for contract negotiations
- First Notice to Proceed for phase one parking lot with 75 days to complete
- Second Notice to Proceed for the remainder of the project with 300 days to complete

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Smith moved to proceed forward with the new bidding schedule, as presented. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(11) **RESOLUTION SETTING REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE R23-10:** Mr. Adams presented Resolution R23-10 setting the Board meeting schedule for 2024 as follows: a regular meeting on the first Tuesday of each month beginning at 6:00 p.m. and the third Tuesday of each month beginning at 6:30 p.m. The Board would hold a work session on the second Tuesday of each month beginning at 1:00 p.m.

***Motion:*** *Commissioner Bryson moved to adopt Resolution R23-10 Setting the Regular Meeting Schedule, as presented. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

**(12) RESOLUTION CHANGING BOARD OF EDUCATION ELECTION**

**SCHEDULE R23-11:** Mr. Adams presented Resolution R23-11 requesting to change the election schedule for the Jackson County Board of Education from the Primary Election to the General Election. It was also requested that the Board of Education elections remain nonpartisan.

***Motion:*** Commissioner Stribling moved to adopt Resolution R23-11 requesting to change the election schedule for the Board of Education from the Primary Election to the General Election in November, as presented. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

**(13) CULLOWHEE PLANNING COUNCIL:**

***Motion:*** Commissioner Jones moved to reappoint Chris Stuckey to serve an additional three-year term on the Cullowhee Planning Council. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

**(14) PLANNING BOARD:**

***Motion:*** Commissioner Bryson moved to reappoint Elmer Humbert, Joyce Cooper, Brian Barwatt and Ken Brown to serve additional two-year terms on the Planning Board. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

**(15) PRESS CONFERENCE:** None.

The Board took a five-minute recess.  
Chairman Letson called the meeting back to order.

**(16) CLOSED SESSION:**

***Motion:*** Commissioner Smith 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 Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Chairman Letson called the regular meeting back to order and stated no action was taken in closed session except the approval of the closed session minutes.

**(17) AGENDA:** Commissioner Bryson moved to amend the agenda to add one item: Parks and Recreation Director. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

**(18) PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR:**

***Motion:*** Commissioner Jones moved to appoint Michael Hopkins as the Parks and Recreation Director, effective January 01, 2024. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

There being no further business, Commissioner Stribling moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

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Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

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Mark A. Letson, Chairman