

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
MAY 14, 2024**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on May 14, 2024, 1:00 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Mark A. Letson, Chairman	Kevin King, County Manager
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	John Kubis, Interim County Attorney (Via Zoom)
Mark Jones, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
John W. Smith, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
Tom Stribling, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) **AGENDA**: Chairman Letson requested to add one item: District 4 Conservation Plan. Commissioner Smith moved to approve the amended agenda. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(2) **THE VILLAGE GREEN**: Ashlie Mitchell, Executive Director, presented:

(a) The Village Green (TVG) had served the heart of the Cashier's community for over 30 years. TVG was a non-profit 501c3 public park system that relied solely on the generosity of grantor organizations such as the Board of Commissioners, individual donors and fundraising events. The 20+ acres of green space provided gathering, recreational and event space open to the public.

(b) History:

- 1992: Two-acre parcel at the Crossroads purchased by Al Balestiere, Elizabeth Davenport and John Lupton to prevent a motel chain from developing the property.
- 1994: Six more acres were donated by the Pulley Family in honor of their granddaughter, created Kara Pulley Park at the playground and picnic shelters. Additional three acres were purchased near the Post Office.
- 1996: Gazebo at the Crossroads was erected.
- 1997: Summit Charter School began its first school year at TVG Commons where the lawn was their playground.
- 2002: Village playground, picnic shelters and picnic pavilion were erected.
- 2003: Boardwalk was erected through the main section of the wetlands.
- 2005: Sculptures were donated and installed.
- 2013: TVG split off from The Village Conservancy and became their own 501-c-3.
- 2019: Lewis Hall was completed as Cashiers' Community Building.
- 2023: 700 linear foot boardwalk rebuilt.
- 2024-present: Playground restoration/expansion was underway. Over 250 days of free community events would be held on park grounds.

(c) Mission: To preserve and enhance land for our community's civic, spiritual, academic, recreational and cultural activities in order to maintain the quality of life for all citizens and visitors to the greater Cashiers area.

(d) Community events: 11 large scale community events and programs with over 30,000 visitors annually.

- (e) Community engagement results:
 - 480 responses over a 3-week period
 - Results were used to guide the TVG Board of Directors in their Strategic Planning Board Retreat in June strategic planning session
 - All questions were asked with the mission in mind
 - Survey was built to narrow the respondent's answers from macro-level wants to micro-level deliverables
 - Macro Level:
 - Free community events: 40.9%
 - Recreational space: 24.9%
 - Preservation: 19.9%
 - Our gardens: 12.2%
 - A nonprofit: 2.1%
 - Micro level:
 - Expand community events: 70%
 - Build a fund reserve: 81%
 - Restore and enhance structures: 89%
 - Preserve and protect the park: 91%
 - Deliverables:
 - Create a 5-7 year master plan to guide TVG through the phasing of repair needs
 - Fundraise to restore and enhance current amenities within the park
 - Continue to protect the 20+ acres TVG owned through collaborative partnerships within the community
- (f) Future:
 - Engage in a master plan to continue to be the heart of Cashiers by serving the community
 - Continue to adapt and evolve with the changing landscape. Focus on collaboration and connectivity with fellow organizations that align with TVG mission
 - Have fun doing it
- (g) The master plan provided by Equinox Environmental would include the following:
 - Existing conditions of current structures and grounds
 - Ordinance and permit review and relevant plans summary
 - Summary of associated planning efforts
 - Park master plan
 - Vision, goals and objectives
 - Recommendations for adaptive use and/or reuse of existing buildings, facilities and structures
 - Master plan
 - Up to three detailed concept area renderings. These would include planning level cost estimates for park improvements with rough order of magnitude infrastructure improvements. One detailed concept area would be a new restroom facility rendering and cost estimate.
 - Permitting requirements
 - Recommendations for term phasing (short and long)
 - Total cost:
 - \$70,000 (\$35,000 remains to be raised)
 - Jackson County TDA Funding \$25,000
 - Al Balistiere Fund \$10,000

Chairman Letson stated the hope was to create a master plan for further fundraising.

Commissioner Jones stated there were so many organizations who utilize The Village Green. He asked Ms. Fox if the Commissioners decided to fund the \$35,000 request, where would she recommend the funds come from?

Ms. Fox stated the grant request was in the upcoming budget proposal, but it would come from contingency.

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

(3) DISTRICT 4 CONSERVATION PLAN: Dr. Bill Horton, Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust Executive Director, presented: District 4 Conservation Plan in follow-up to the ULI Study potential benefit for all of the county:

(a) Why a conservation plan:

- #1 ULI Recommendation
- Mountain beauty, water and air were not guaranteed
- Review zoning and ordinances
- Big benefits included economics, agriculture, hiking, fishing, recreation, jobs, health
- It was not about tree-hugging, it was critical for the future of the area
- Second highest rainfall in continental US
- Blue wall steepest rate of US elevation change climate buffer and biodiversity hotspot
- Largest variety of fish, mussels and crayfish in temperate world
- 400 rare plants, 250 endemic plants - #1 globally

(b) A long-range conservation plan would set the state for all other efforts to preserve community character and heritage.

(c) Specify priorities for open space preservation including stream buffers, areas near designated natural heritage areas, mature stands of trees, terminal vistas and view sheds.

(d) Plan Development Process 22-24:

- Coalition Group
- County, Planning Board and Commissioners
- Two Advisory Panels
- Stakeholder views, best practices and framework
- Professional document (Equinox proposal)
- Planning Board input
- Commissioner deliberation and adoption initially for District 4, intent to leverage across the county as desired

(e) Land Management and Practical Considerations:

- Watersheds
- Managed areas (USFS, CE, Nat Heritage)
- Connectivity was key
- Private vs. public rights
- Incentives and regulations
- Uses and infrastructure needs
- Unincorporated implications
- County control vs. state or federal

(f) Framework Focus Areas:

- Watersheds and water recharge
- Buffer expansions
- Open space: type, density and use
- Dark sky benefits
- Tree protections

- Viewshed and steep slopes
- Strategic parcels
- (g) Presentations to date:
 - CCC Coalition (2022, 2023 x 2)
 - Chamber and CPC
 - Merrie Woode Conservation Symposium
 - County Planning Staff
 - County Planning Board
 - County Commissioners
 - County Commissioners
- (h) Next Step: Equinox:
 - Independent profession plan for Commissioner review and codification
 - Complex expertise domains required
 - Strong record with county projects
 - Deliverable: Policy recommendations and final doc ready for Commissioner review
 - Cost \$167,000 in six stages, one year to complete
- (i) Equinox Proposal Elements:
 - Steering committee
 - District 4 key stakeholder group
 - Inventory resources and opportunities
 - Mapping and data analysis
 - Code and ordinance review
 - Case studies and best practices
 - Public engagement and surveys
 - Policy priorities, recs and plan document
- (j) Operational Structure:
 - Fiscal agent 501c3 – Mountain True
 - Tactical and facilitation work – Equinox
 - Support and strategy – Steering Committee, HCLT and OSI
 - Advisory – County Staff and District 4 represented on Steering Committee
 - Deliverable – Goal to begin July 2024- July 2025
- (k) Financial Support:
 - County Commissioners
 - County TDA
 - Community Foundation of WNC
 - Highlands Cashiers Health Foundation
 - Appalachian Regional Commission
 - Other foundations
 - Privation donations
- (l) Financial Summary:
 - Equinox Conservation Plan for District 4 \$167,000
 - Need \$40,000 to start in lead funding
 - Need \$90,000 total in donations plus pledges
 - Requesting \$80,000 from the county
 - Remainder via other grants and private
 - Begin July 2024

Chairman Letson stated the initial hope was to take some of the critical information learned by the study and place it in applicable areas around the county to help shape the natural environment.

Commissioner Jones stated water protection and water recharge was so important to the community, particularly the Tuckasegee River. That component of the project was crucial to the county.

General discussions were held.

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

(4) 4-H CLUB ACTIVITIES: Rob Hawk, Cooperative Extension Agent; Kayla Thomas, 4H Extension Agent; and Freda Childers, Administrative Assistant were present for this item.

Mr. Hawk stated Mr. King requested an update on the growing interest in shooting sports in the county, which was popular across the state and nation.

Ms. Thomas stated the county's 4-H Shooting Sports Club, Gritty Triggers, would be starting its first season that year. A riflery and a shotgun program would be offered for youth ages 8-18. A 4-H shooting sports club had proven to be in high demand in the county. Smoky Mountain High School helped meet the demand by providing shooting sports opportunities to its students. The new 4-H club would allow youth from throughout the county ages 8-18 to participate on a competitive level.

The North Carolina 4-H Shooting Sports Program was a high-quality program that promoted positive youth development by engaging youth in the safe, responsible use of firearms through comprehensive education, life-long recreation and healthy competition. It used a prevention education model that strongly emphasized positive youth-adult interaction and peer leadership. The program relied on certified instructors to conduct classes in the various disciplines (archery, pistol, shotgun, muzzle loading, rifle and wildlife/hunting).

The program would be overseen by the county 4-H Agent. It would be guided by two adult instructors, who had been certified by the North Carolina 4-H Shooting Sports Coordinator, registered in the 4-H Online System and endorsed as volunteers through the Cooperative Extension background check process. Also, they had undergone training in the National 4-H Shooting Sports Volunteer Curriculum, which was the North Carolina 4-H established adult teaching curriculum for training adults to teach youth the shooting sports within the 4-H program. They also completed state level 4-H shooting sports workshops in the specific disciplines they would teach. Instructors accepted and would abide by the National 4-H Shooting Sports Code of Ethics.

The club would have a written risk management plan, which included an emergency action plan, club insurance, description of safe storage and transportation of firearms and ammunition and state-level reloading policies. Also, accident reporting forms, required personal protection equipment of participants, parental consents and the health/emergency contacts of participants. This plan modeled the National 4-H Shooting Sports Committee's Best Management Practices of a 4-H Shooting Sports Program. The club was also compliant with the Youth Handgun Safety Act.

The club's first meeting on May 30 would be an orientation to the club as well as a safety training. The club would practice six times throughout the summer on the first and third Monday of each month at the Coon Hunters Association property. Practice would be to prepare for the 4-H district competition in Polk County on August 10. At each practice, club participants would be supervised by 4-H Instructors and Safety Officer volunteers (parents who have enrolled as volunteers to help with the club). All 4-H volunteers were background-checked.

Participants would use their personal firearms during this season, as they raised funds in order to purchase 4-H-owned firearms for future seasons. In the rifle program, participants would shoot Small Bore Rifle, .22lr. The club was on track to be a chartered 4-H club that year, meaning they would have youth officers, business meetings and bylaws, would complete a community service project each year and participants would participate in additional 4-H activities.

Cooperative Extension and the community were very excited to start the program. They were looking forward to a safe and fun opportunity for youth to explore their interest and passion in shooting sports.

Chairman Letson stated he thought it was a wonderful program and only positive things would come from this. This program taught so much about patience, composure, resiliency and safety.

Commissioner Stribling stated he thought it was a great program.

Commissioner Bryson stated he thought this was really good for the county. He asked if the Coon Club was up to date and had all they needed?

Ms. Childers stated the lease with the county would be coming up in October. The current lease was \$100 per year for the last 20 years.

Commissioner Bryson stated he thought they should revisit the lease for another 20-25 years. The Coon Club meant a lot to him growing up and he wanted to see it continue to grow.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(5) MEDICAID TOBACCO FREE POLICY: Anna Lippard, Health Director, presented: Tobacco Free Policy - NC Medicaid Requirement:

(a) NC Standard Plan and LME/MCO (including Tailored Plan) Tobacco-Free Policy Requirement Starting July 1, 2024, most Standard Plan and LME/MCO (including Tailored Plan) contracted providers would be required to implement a 100% tobacco-free policy.

(b) Why NC Medicaid was implementing a tobacco free policy requirement?

- NC Medicaid was committed to protecting the health of beneficiaries, healthcare providers and staff. Tobacco-related illness was the number one preventable cause of death and disability among Medicaid beneficiaries in North Carolina.
- A 100% tobacco-free treatment environment was an essential component of offering evidence-based tobacco use treatment.
- The Surgeon General found there was no safe level of secondhand smoke. No one should be exposed to secondhand smoke, even for a short period of time, to receive all the services they needed to reach their goals.

(c) Understanding Smoke Free vs. Tobacco Free Policy:

- “Smoking”: the use or possession of a lighted cigarette, lighted cigar, lighted pipe or any other lighted tobacco product.
- “Tobacco”: any product made from or derived from tobacco or that contained nicotine, intended for human consumption or likely to be consumed, whether smoked, heated, chewed, absorbed, dissolved, inhaled or ingested by any other means, including, but not limited to, a cigarette, a cigar, pipe tobacco, chewing tobacco, snuff, or snus. Also, electronic smoking devices and any component or accessory used in the consumption of a tobacco product, such as filters, rolling papers, pipes and substances used in electronic smoking devices, whether or not they contain nicotine.

(d) Local Health Departments:

- All Local Health Departments would be required to be 100% Tobacco-Free by July 1, 2024. This policy would include buildings, grounds and vehicles.
- Currently, Jackson County Health Department was 100% Tobacco-Free except for its grounds, which had a 50-foot Tobacco-Free perimeter from the building.
- To comply with the Medicaid Tobacco-Free policy, Jackson County Health Department’s grounds would be required to be 100% Tobacco-Free.
- New tobacco-free signage would be provided free by MountainWise.

(e) Not just policy, treatment: NC Standard and Tailored plans were also required to:

- Increase the use of tobacco use treatment medications and counseling in all settings
- Train care managers on brief interventions and standard of care tobacco use treatment
- Provide Quitline services
- Promote tobacco use treatment benefit utilization to beneficiaries

(f) Helping smokers quit:

- Support + coaching = success.
- Medication plus counseling doubles the success rate.

(g) Provider compliance:

- Not Punitive
- Monitoring for the tobacco-free policy requirement would occur through a grievance/complaint process.
- Technical assistance by the NC Division of Public Health's (DPH) Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch would be used to address grievances/complaints related to exposure to tobacco use on contracted provider property subject to the tobacco-free policy requirement.

She noted the Board of Health was in full support of the policy.

General discussions were held.

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

(6) **CANADA VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT:** Mr. King presented a letter received from the Canada Volunteer Fire Department requesting to fully lease both sides of the building they currently leased located at 149 Charleys Creek Road, along with the assurance that the required repairs and upgrades would be carried out. Since the building also served the community, they would continue to host events and engage the community.

Repair of the structure was required to improve the facilities for the fire department and community demands. A full remodel of the existing structure would be required, in addition to other improvements and repairs. Currently, the facility did not comply with the ADA expanded guidelines for public properties. With repairs, the property could become a significant asset to the community, providing emergency shelter for residents and support to other organizations during significant weather events, fires and rescue operations.

The Canada Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department provided search and rescue, fire and EMT level medical services. The building also served as a community meeting place for events. These community benefits underscored the importance of the request for the necessary repairs and improvements. The Department formally requested to fully lease the building, with all necessary repairs and improvements by the county. This would allow continued use of the facility in ways that would benefit operations and the community. Potential benefits would be improved emergency services, enhanced community engagement and increased capacity for events.

General discussions were held.

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

(7) **BOARD AND COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS:** Mr. King stated the county appointments on boards and commissions were sporadic throughout the year. He proposed to change the method so more people could engage in civil activities and be involved by being a part of different organizations throughout the county. He discussed with Teague Campbell how the appointments could be either in June or June and December. They could then publicize in the newspaper in advance to get more people involved. Without going back to each bylaw of each board created throughout the years, they were looking at one instrument for a blanket approach. This would be his recommendation to the Board to look at having appointments two times per year.

Chairman Letson stated he thought having appointments twice per year or even quarterly, would be helpful for everyone.

Informational item.

(8) OTHER BUSINESS: Darlene Fox, Finance Director, presented updated budget requests for the Board's review.

- (a) Capital Outlay Detail Total Equipment: \$3,296,173
- (b) Capital Improvements Detail: \$4,548,699
- (c) Personnel Changes total additional increases: \$1,414,417
- (d) Nonprofit Grant Applications received to date: \$2,236,467

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

There being no further business, Commissioner Stribling moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman