

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
JANUARY 07, 2025**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on January 07, 2025, 6:30 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present:	Mark A. Letson, Chairman	Kevin King, County Manager
	Jenny Lynn Hooper, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
	Michael Jennings, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
	John W. Smith, Commissioner	
Absent:	Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) FRIENDS OF THE JACKSON COUNTY GREENWAYS: Jay Spiro, Board Member, Friends of the Jackson County Greenways, stated the Friends of the Jackson County Greenways was an all-volunteer group of local citizens who advocated for Greenway expansion in the county. They worked closely with county officials and the Parks and Recreation Department to realize a shared vision for a more extensive network of Greenway opportunities for all members of the community to enjoy.

Greenways improved quality of life by promoting active lifestyles, provided transportation alternatives, stimulated economic development and created more spaces for all to connect with friends and neighbors in the outdoors. They were incredibly excited about the progress made throughout the county within the last year, including strategic investments by county and municipal governments in creating and improving pedestrian-friendly areas within the region.

The dedication of resources and commitment to seek out unique funding opportunities demonstrated the value placed on securing special places for citizens to recreate safely outdoors. These were smart investments with implications for the region's health, tourism, economic growth, mobility and safety. The Friends of the Jackson County Greenways enthusiastically stood ready to encourage and financially assist with the continued momentum. As a non-profit organization, they had access to funding opportunities not available to local governments. Demonstrating broad base regional support could be critical to competitive grant success.

On behalf of the Friends of the Jackson County Greenways, he requested a letter in support of ongoing efforts to improve and expand Greenways in the county.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Staff to provide a letter of support to the Friends of the Jackson County Greenway, as requested.*

(2) HERE IN JACKSON COUNTY: Gretta Worley, Executive Director of HERE and Dr. Marilyn Chamberlin, Board Chair of HERE, were present for this item.

Ms. Worley presented:

(a) Strategic Plan for HERE and proposal for funding the county's first brick and mortar homeless shelter. HERE's Mission Statement was to make homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring by providing safe shelter, essential resources and supportive services that help individuals and families transition to permanent, stable housing.

(b) Executive Summary: Establish the county's first brick and mortar homeless shelter, addressing a long-standing gap in local services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Located at a repurposed daycare center, it would initially serve as a cold weather shelter during winter months, with plans to transition into a year-round congregate shelter.

The facility would initially shelter up to 24 individuals and two families, providing essential services, such as case management, transportation, meals and referrals to mental health, employment and social support services. By fostering community collaboration and leveraging local and external funding sources, the shelter aimed to mitigate homelessness in the county and surrounding areas.

The strategic plan outlined the shelter's vision, goals, renovation details, financial projections, operational strategy and measurable outcomes. The total cost of purchasing and renovating the facility was estimated at \$500,000, with additional funding required for operational costs in phases 1 and 2.

(c) Dr. Chamberlin stated there was a long history of HERE in the county. Prior to HERE, she worked with the homeless program overseeing the task force to look at homelessness and the options available. The report provided to the Commissioners, at that time, indicated there would be a point where it would no longer be sustainable to use a hotel model.

HERE was part of the discussion when the ARPA funds came through and it was requested for HERE to do more research. At that time, the Commissioners paid a private research firm to conduct a project that ended with an impact study on homelessness in the county. Several discussions were held with various stakeholders and focus groups in the county. They concluded with a one-year plan to focus attention on services they provided. In two to three years, phase 2 would be a permanent shelter beginning with cold weather that would be broadened to a year-round shelter in four years.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(3) BUSINESS OF CHILD CARE: Tiffany Henry, Economic Development Director and Jeff Andrews, President of Business of Childcare, were present for this item.

Ms. Henry stated she had been working with several partners and received a grant from Dogwood Health to hire Jeff Andrews and his team with the Business of Child Care.

Mr. Andrews presented: Child Care Efforts Update:

(a) Unlocking workforce potential for economic growth: Child care was more than a basic need for families. It was an economic multiplier and an accelerator for economic growth. Accessible child care empowers workers to realize their true wage potential, providing employers with the workforce they need for growth. This leads to stronger economies and stronger communities.

(b) Child Care Solutions Activation Plan Process:

- Opportunities and Outcomes Workshop: A collaborative event where stakeholders convene to discuss challenges and opportunities related to child care in the local community, fostering collective understanding and finding agreement on desired outcomes.
- Solution Pathways Review: A preliminary presentation of potential solutions and their anticipated impacts, designed to provide the community with a range of outcome options to target based on their preferences.

- Child Care Solutions Activation Plan: A strategic roadmap for implementing solutions that best align with the community’s identified goals, concentrating on the desired outcomes established through community engagement.
- (c) State of Child Care in the county:
- Potential need for child care under age 6: 1,635
 - Private or community-based programs: 7
 - Public school-based programs: 8
 - Family child care homes: 2
 - Faith based programs: 1
- (d) Problems, challenges and opportunities
- (e) Focus area for the county:
- Organizational and funding support:
 - Centralized support structure: Proposal for countywide organization to coordinate resources, advocacy and funding for child care. This entity would represent child care providers in policy discussions, ensure funding accessibility and create a collective approach to child care challenges.
 - Community Subsidy Fund: Advocacy for a community-based fund to close affordability gaps for families. The fund would provide financial support to families and providers, sustaining operations and increasing accessibility.
 - Workforce and talent pipeline development:
 - Unified pipeline programs: Emphasis on a coordinated child care workforce pipeline spanning high schools, community colleges and universities. Initiatives could include pre-apprenticeships, scholarships and certifications to encourage career pathways starting in high school.
 - Partnerships for training and retention: Partnerships with educational institutions would provide students with real world experience through internships or paid apprenticeships, fostering interest and advancement in child care careers.
 - Startup and ongoing subsidies for Child Care:
 - Providers incentives and low-cost facilities: Support for new child care businesses through grants, tax incentives and access to low cost county owned properties.
 - Sustainable operational funding: Ongoing operational subsidies to support new centers beyond state and federal funding.
 - Expanded programming models:
 - Summer and after school programs: Quick win opportunities identified in expanding summer and after school programming to meet community needs for school aged children. Collaborations with existing providers could bridge critical gaps and support working parents.
 - Flexible child care models: Development of alternative care models tailored to community specific needs, such as kinship or multi-generational care, particularly for the Hispanic community.

Ms. Henry stated Mr. Andrews had a lot of experience working with child care providers and communities in many states, including North Carolina. She had become involved with this issue because child care impacted housing and economic development. All over the county, there were waiting lists for placement. She had a team that included Mountain Projects, DSS, Partnership for Children Region A, JCPS and Southwestern Child Development. She thought it was important to find out a way to chip away at some of the issues.

General discussions were held.
Informational item.

(4) UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE: Michael Poston, Planning Director, stated Planning Staff had been working with the US 441 Planning Council and the Cullowhee Planning Councils to make technical corrections to the use tables in these districts. The corrections would make clear that governmental recreational uses were allowed in Rural Living district in the US 441 district and the Single Family Residential and Single-Family Manufactured Home districts in Cullowhee. While some recreational uses were allowed in some of these districts, it was not clear that all of the recreation plans the county had for facilities in these areas would be allowed. These corrections would clarify governmental recreational uses were allowed within these residential areas.

The proposed changes were consistent with the both the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the Jackson County 2040 Land Use Plan and the Cullowhee Small Area Plan. Both Councils would hold public hearings to review the proposed changes to the use tables. The Planning Board would also review the proposed changes and make a recommendation. Staff would then request the Board of Commissioners schedule a public hearing for the purposes of considering the proposed amendments.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Add this item to a future agenda for consideration to set a public hearing.*

(5) PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT REPORT: Michael Hopkins, Parks and Recreation Director, presented: Parks and Recreation Department updates:

(a) Mission and Vision:

- Mission: Enhance the quality of life for residents by providing accessible, safe and inclusive recreational opportunities and preserving natural resources.
- Vision: Create a community where recreation and nature foster physical, mental and social well-being, ensuring a sustainable and vibrant future for all.

(b) Key Project updates:

- Aquatics Center:
 - Progress: Facility had been completed. A week-long soft opening was held in December to trail and acclimate staff.
 - Next steps: Working towards having more of a defined hours of operation dependent upon lifeguard staffing.
- Webster Park:
 - Progress: ADA Playground, Pavilion and Trail Lighting installed.
 - Current focus: Parking and Trail improvements.
- Qualla/Whittier:
 - Progress: Bid approved for Cherokee Enterprises.
 - Next steps: Finalize contract and begin project. Would have a year to complete from signing the contract.
- Greenway:
 - Progress: Property continued to be acquired for expansion. When all deals were finalized, they had the potential to add an additional 1.6 miles of Greenway.
 - Next steps: Finalize land acquisitions and begin Greenway build out with the help of Public Works and contract help. A feasibility study was underway for the bottleneck area of Ledbetter Road.

(c) Damage Assessments and Restorations:

- East LaPorte Park:
 - Progress: BH Grading Landscaping was in process of restoring the park after damage from Hurricane Helene.
 - Next steps: When finalized, the park would be fully functional.

(d) Programs and Events in 2024:

- Youth Program participants: 1,844

- Programs offered: 436
- Facility rentals: 1,854
- (e) Recreation Centers:
 - Fitness usage:
 - Cashiers Fitness Classes 1,110 with 11,222 participants
 - Cullowhee Fitness Classes 1,398 with 7,196 participants
- (f) County Parks:
 - Canada Community Park
 - East LaPorte Park
 - Cullowhee Recreation Center Park
 - Mark Watson Park
 - Balsam Community Center
 - Cashiers Community Park
 - Fairview Youth Complex
 - Judaculla Rock
 - Savannah Community Park
 - Shook Cove Access Area
 - Locust Creek Access Area
 - Webster Access Area
 - CJ Harris Access Area
 - Barkers Creek Access Area
 - RJ Andrews Campground
- (g) Employees:
 - 17 full-time
 - 3 permanent part-time
 - 64 part-time
 - 16 seasonal part-time
 - 32 instructors
 - 5 personal trainers
- (h) Future Plans:
 - 10-year Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Department Master Plan to be completed by December 2025.
 - Rebid Cashiers Community Park.
 - Greenway buildout.
 - Athletic Field surfacing upgrades.
 -

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(6) TAX REAPPRAISAL: Tabitha Ashe, Tax Administrator, presented: 2025 Reappraisal:

- (a) Median Sales Price:
 - County in 2020: \$288,997
 - County in 2024: \$423,071
 - Sylva in 2020: \$216,842
 - Sylva in 2024: \$320,196
 - Cashiers in 2020: \$760,447
 - Cashiers in 2024: \$1,393,165
- (b) Map of sales since 2021 provided
- (c) Examples of 2024 sales and percent changes provided

(d) The real estate market was constantly changing. All sales prior to the end of 2024 must be adjusted to the appropriate percent change to capture the market value as of January 1, 2025.

(e) North Carolina counties median home list price: Jackson \$849,500 - 98%

(f) Current listing examples provided

(g) Preliminary values:

• Tax Base comparison:

- 2024 Real Property Taxable Value \$11.456B
- Estimated 2025 Real Property Taxable Value \$18,397B
- \$ Increase \$6.941B
- % Increase 60.59%
- Values still being finalized. Prior to appeals.

• This did not mean all properties would change by 60%. The change would be based on sales that took place in the area prior to the reappraisal. Each area in the county and each property type change at different rates.

(h) Reappraisal Notice example provided

(i) Appeals: The deadline to submit an informal appeal was 30 days from the date of the notice. The appeal could be submitted in person, by mail or online. No decision would be made until after the deadline. This allowed the tax office to see if there were taxing neighborhoods or property types/elements that needed additional review. Also, it removed any emotional decision making, which could create inequities. The goal was to ensure all property owners were paying their fair share, nothing more or less. If property owners did not agree with the value, they recommend to appeal and allow the tax office to take another look at the property.

(j) Tax Bill: The notice would determine the assessed value. The tax rates were set during the budget process by the County Commissioners and Municipal Boards. The tax rates would not be set until late June, 2025. Appeals would be finalized before tax rates were established.

(k) Property Tax Relief:

- Seniors
- Disabled
- Disabled Veterans

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(7) **AQUATIC CENTER**: Mr. King stated 45 part-time positions were needed for the operations at the Aquatics Center. Mr. Hopkins came up with an option he supported and recommended that would not increase the budget total, but would increase the amount of full-time positions versus part-time positions. He requested to add this to the next agenda for consideration.

Mr. Hopkins stated it was not sustainable to keep 45 part-time lifeguards year around. The funds that were already in place for part-time positions would transfer to full-time positions.

General discussions were held.

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

There being no further business, Commissioner Jennings moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman