

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
MAY 06, 2025**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on May 06, 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
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	John Kubis, County Attorney (Via Zoom)
Jenny Lynn Hooper, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board
Michael Jennings, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
John W. Smith, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) PUBLIC SCHOOLS BUDGET REQUEST: Dr. Dana Ayers, Superintendent of Schools, presented: Budget Request 2025-2026 School Year:

(a) 2025-26 Goals:

- Increase monetary support for continued CEP-No cost lunches
- Maximum of 4% increase for all staff
- Continue six Student Support positions funded through the county
- HVAC and Fire Alarm System for Jackson Community School (estimated \$500,000)
- Increase local supplements:
 - 325 Certified at \$2,500
 - 250 Non-Certified at \$1,500

(b) JROTC Reserve Officers' Training Corps:

- 2024 Establishing Costs:
 - Personnel January – June \$119,935
 - Army MIPs reimbursement \$7,337 per month, approx. \$44,022 January – June
 - Total costs to the District \$75,913
 - Equipment and supplies \$6,542
- Reoccurring Program Costs:
 - Projected personnel costs for 11 months \$233,904
 - Projected Army MIPs reimbursement \$8,000, approx. \$88,000 August – June
 - Total costs to the District \$145,904
 - Anticipated program costs \$75,000

(c) 2025-2026 Requests:

- Provide complete funding for local paid employees' salary increases
- Provide funding for mandates that impact the local budget by exceeding state allotments
- Provide funding for any state bonuses for locally paid staff
- Providing funding for local supplement increases for both certified and non-certified staff
- Funding for JROTC Program
- Funding to continue No Cost Meals

General discussions were held.

- (d) Two major components of the budget:
 - Operating Budget: primary sources of funding were from state, federal, grants and county tax dollars
 - Capital Budget: primary sources of funding were from Articles 40 and 42
- (e) Charter Schools:
 - Received a prorated portion of the county allotment based on enrollment
 - 2025 \$1,000,000 would be allotted to Charter Schools
 - Charters were eligible to receive state and federal funds directly
 - Charters were eligible to apply for grant funding

General discussions were held.

- (f) 2025-26 Request:
 - \$8,201,622 Operations
 - \$1,664,541 Supplement
 - \$595,466 Counselors
 - \$220,904 JROTC
 - \$983,460 Costs that exceeded state allotments
 - \$11,665,993 Total operations budget request
 - \$700,000+ CEP lunches all schools
 - \$1,500,000+ Charter Schools
 - \$500,000+ Jackson Community School HVAC and Fire Alarm System
 - \$14,158,993 Total Request

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(2) **OPIOID SETTLEMENT**: Meagan Cagle, Health Education Supervisor and Jodie Rodewald, Substance Use Prevention Coordinator, present for this item.

Ms. Cagle presented: Opioid Settlement Wave One 2025-2028 Spending Plan:

- (a) Priority Strategies:
 - Recovery Support Services: Fund evidence-based recovery support services including peer support specialists in community-based organizations to support people who use drugs in accessing addiction treatment, recovery support, harm reduction services and/or primary healthcare.
 - Evidence Based Addiction Treatment: Support evidence-based addiction treatment for opioid use disorder including MAT.
 - Early Intervention: Fund programs, services or trainings to encourage early identification and intervention for children and adolescents who may be struggling with problematic use of drugs or mental health conditions.
 - Naloxone Distribution: Funding naloxone distribution through community organizations and first responders at LifePoint Health.
- (b) Collaborative Strategic Plan Process:
 - Complete: July 2023 – August 2024: Region A Strategic Planning Process
 - Session 1: December 2024 Building shared vision and understanding
 - Session 2: January 2025 Shaping strategy options
 - Session 3: February 2025 Making decisions and clarifying details
 - Complete: Received Requests for Proposals March 2025
 - Complete: Met with Steering Committee to review proposals April 2025

Ms. Rodewald presented:

(c) Opioid Settlements for Jackson County:

- \$6,130,782 over 18 years (2022 to 2038)
- \$1,820,000 so far
- FY 2025-2026 \$490,000
- As of July 1, 2025: \$2,310,000

(d) Spending Plan:

- Recovery Support Services (July 2025 through June 2028 = \$840,016): Establish a peer-led recovery center in Jackson county to address the urgent need for accessible, community-based recovery support. This center would provide peer support, recovery coaching, resource navigation and educational programming to individuals impacted by opioid use disorder (OUD) and other substance use challenges.
- Evidence-Based Addiction Treatment (July 2025 through June 2028 = \$225,000): Support the continuation of a residential rehabilitation program that addresses the whole person by providing spiritual transformation, behavioral counseling, life skills training, physical health support, workforce development and continued care after graduation. This program equips women impacted by opioid use disorder (OUD) and other substance use challenges with the tools needed for long-term recovery and wellness.
- Early Intervention (July 2025 through June 2028 = \$234,298.48): To expand Substance Use Education and Treatment by hiring a Mental Health Addictions Specialist to meet the increasing demand for youth services in Jackson County. This specialist would collaborate with juvenile justice, schools, recovery community agencies, outpatient-based opioid treatment and social services to provide treatment and services to children and adolescents who may be struggling with problematic use of substances or mental health conditions.
- Naloxone Distribution (July 2025 through June 2028 = \$72,000): To expand educational opportunities within the community as well as continue to allow community members access to items that could help reduce opioid related overdoses at no cost.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(3) PLANNING REPORT: Michael Poston, Planning Director reported:

(a) History of Planning:

- Development regulations created in late 19th century to combat public health issues arising in cities
- Plan of Chicago: In 1909 first comprehensive plan in United States
- Daniel Burnham: “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do thing that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.”
- Mid-20th Century-Concepts of social and environmental considerations were integrated into planning.
- Mid-to-late 20th Century-Planning and public health lost their connection to each other.
- Planning in 21st Century brought public health and planning back together.
- Planners were talking about implementation as much as the planning process.

- (b) Planning in North Carolina:**
 - Zoned counties: 67
 - Unzoned counties: 20
 - Partially Zoned counties: 13
 - Cashiers Area Zoning Area
 - Cullowhee Community Planning Area
 - US 441 Gateway Corridor
- (c) Planning Department:**
 - Planning Director: Michael Poston
 - Senior Planner: John Jeleniewski
 - Planner I: Ashley Clapsaddle
 - Administrative Assistant: Allison Kelley
- (d) Planning Department Responsibilities:**
 - Long Range Planning
 - Comprehensive Planning for future growth and development
 - Comprehensive Transportation Planning
 - Small Area Plans
 - Current Planning
 - Ordinance enforcement and maintenance
 - Support of planning boards and councils
 - Plat and subdivision approvals
 - Site plan review
 - Cell tower and co-location review
 - Housing and community development
- (e) Planning History:**
 - 1968: Recreation Master Plan
 - 1974, 1977, 1985: Land Development Plan
 - 1992: Comprehensive Study
 - 2000: Land Use Plan
 - 2008 441 Small Area Plan
 - 2009: Greenway Master Plan
 - 2009: Tuckasegee River Greenway Phase 1
 - 2013: Recreation Master Plan
 - 2014: Cullowhee Vision Plan
 - 2017: Comprehensive Land Plan
 - 2018: Cashiers Small Area Plan
 - 2019: Cullowhee Small Area Plan
 - 2021: Walks Pedestrian Plan
- (f) 1974 Land Development Plan:**
 - 1974: establish building and plumbing codes and hire enforcement staff
 - 1975: reactivate the county Planning Board
 - 1977: prepare County Facilities Plan
 - 1992: Create Water and Sewer Authority
 - 2000: Adopt Sedimentation Control
 - 2003: Implement Zoning for strategic areas
 - 2007: adopt Subdivision Standards
 - Establish a full time Planning Department
- (g) Suitability of Land for Development**

- (h) Current planning:**
 - Ordinance Administration
 - Site Plan Review
 - Zoning and Sign Permits
 - Council and Committee Meetings
 - Historic and Cultural Preservation
 - Housing and Community Development
- (i) Zoning and Sign Permits issued:**
 - 156 2021
 - 159 2022
 - 131 2023
 - 127 2024
 - 41 2025 to date
- (j) Planning Boards and Councils:**
 - Municipal:
 - Town of Sylva
 - Town of Webster
 - Town of Dillsboro
 - Village of Forest Hills
 - County:
 - Planning Board
 - Cashiers Planning Council
 - Cullowhee Planning Council
 - US 441 Gateway District Community Planning Council
 - Historic Preservation Commission
 - Board of Commissioners
- (k) Planning Council Powers and Duties:**
 - To review new text amendments to ordinances and proposals to zone or change zoning of regulated property
 - To review and decide on approval of requests for conditional use permits
 - To hear and decide applications for approval of variances
 - To hear and decide appeals made by administrative officers
 - Act as Board of Adjustment and Watershed Review Board as needed
 - Conduct studies of the County and the surrounding areas
 - Determine objectives to be sought in the development of the study area
 - Prepare and adopt plans for achieving these objectives
 - Develop and recommend policies, ordinances, administrative procedures and other means for carrying out plans in a coordinated and efficient manner.
 - Exercise any functions in the administration and enforcement of various means for carrying out plans the BOC may direct
 - Perform any other related duties the BOC may direct
- (l) Historic Preservation Commission Powers and Duties:**
 - Purpose: To designate and protect local districts, landmarks and sites that were significant to Jackson County's history. This was done by and enforcing design standards for the review of any changes made to those districts, landmarks and sites to ensure their longevity and integrity. The commission also takes part in public education on local historic buildings and resources.
 - Projects: Working to modernizing the Historic Preservation Ordinance to comply with updated state statutes and programing for Historic Preservation Month and Mountain Heritage Day.

(m) Regular Meeting Dates:

- Cullowhee Planning Council: First Monday of the month at 6:00 p.m. in the Hospitality Room at WCU's Ramsey Center or in the Heritage Room at the Department on Aging
- Historic Preservation Commission: Third Tuesday of the month at 5:15 p.m. in the Conference Room at the Jackson County Public Library
- Cashiers Planning Council: Fourth Monday of the month at 5:00 p.m. at the Cashiers Recreation Center
- Jackson County Planning Board: Fourth Thursday of the month at 6:00 p.m. in the Hospitality Room at the Department on Aging
- US 441 Gateway District Community Planning Council: Meets as needed at the Qualla Community Center

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(4) POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR APPOINTMENTS: Mr. King presented a draft resolution to establish policy and procedures for appointments to county boards, commissions, committees or authorities. The document laid out the framework the Board had been discussing for the appointment process and would realign the appointments to June and December. It would also allow for an interview process if the Board chose to do so.

General discussions were held.

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

(5) CASHIERS WATER AND SEWER: Mr. King stated he and Chairman Letson had conversations about water and sewer in Cashiers and the need for a study to be done. He presented a proposal from Civil Design Concepts in the amount of \$100,000 for a water study. The additional amount to add sewer for the Horsepasture issue would be \$42,000. They wanted to look at creative ways to get the project developed. The total amount for the study would be \$142,000.

Chairman Letson stated they needed to get a plan in place and this would be the first step.

General discussions were held.

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

(6) FONTANA REGIONAL LIBRARY: Commissioner Smith stated he continued to receive feedback from people about displays at the library. People attended library board meetings and seemed to be pushed to the side and not listened to. The Board of Commissioners had made appointments to the FRL Board, but it did not seem to be changing direction. They continued to promote the same ideology that most people in the county rejected.

Commissioner Hooper stated she thought leadership needed to change.

Commissioner Jennings asked what the Commissioners could do.

Mr. King stated the two most direct ways the Board had to make changes was through board appointments and appropriations. The third option would be exercising their rights under the Agreement.

Commissioner Jennings asked if the Board could let FRL know something needed to change or the county would get out?

Chairman Letson stated if that was the pleasure of the Board, that would be where they would go. He thought they needed to have the discussion with other counties as well.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Hooper stated the majority of the people in Jackson County did not want to see some of the things being displayed in the library.

Commissioner Jennings stated he agreed. It seemed the library was promoting certain agendas.

Commissioner Bryson stated county dollars should not promote anything. It should be 100% neutral. Tax dollars came from different people throughout the county. Every department and organization funded by the county should remain neutral.

Commissioner Smith stated he agreed.

Commissioner Jennings stated anyone should be able to go to the library and not be appalled by anything that was there, no matter which side they were on. Being neutral was what needed to happen or something needed to change.

Chairman Letson stated that was why they entered into the FRL Agreement.

Commissioner Bryson stated he had high hopes with the FRL Agreement and he was still hopeful because they worked on it for several months to get to a good agreement.

Commissioner Smith stated the county spent a lot of money to get the Agreement and the Board thought that would change the direction.

General discussions were held.

Chairman Letson stated he was hearing from the Commissioners, they needed to see better direction from the FRL Board.

Commissioner Smith stated he did not know if getting out was the right answer, but if they could not change direction then he did not believe they were leaving the Board with much choice.

Commissioner Jennings stated he thought they should let FRL know the options. They had to make it neutral or he thought the county should get out.

Commissioner Hooper stated she agreed.

Commissioner Smith stated he hated it had to come to that. He did not want to ban any books. Everyone had the right to read whatever they wanted to read, but he did not want agendas to be thrown in people's faces. It needed to be neutral or equal representation. If they did not change direction, he was fine to get out. They would need to move by June 30th, which was the deadline.

Chairman Letson stated he thought FRL was trying, but needed to work harder for that.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Hooper requested Mr. King explore options about leaving the Agreement and bring those back to the Board for further discussions.

Mr. King stated if the Board decided to get out and gave notice to FRL of its intent, they would have one year to wait. He asked Mr. Kubis if they could they jump back in if things changed?

Mr. Kubis stated he would have to go back to the Agreement, but his recollection was there would be nothing in the Agreement to prevent them from going back if they changed their mind during the one-year period. The whole unwinding process was a little messy because of the different ownership of things, so there was a lot to do with that.

Commissioner Smith stated the way he read the NC Administrative Code, the one-year was a cooling off period so everyone could come to a different agreement, if they wanted to.

Mr. King stated he would bring back with "what if" scenarios to a future meeting for further discussions.

Mr. Smith stated he was there to serve the citizens of the county and by and large, they were not happy with what was going on.

General discussions were held.

Consensus: *Add this item to a future agenda for further discussions.*

(7) **OTHER BUSINESS:** Commissioner Smith stated he had talked to couple of people that worked at different waste management facilities and citizens. There was a concern about people with out-of-state tags dumping their trash. Some other counties had a process for citizens to get a sticker when they renewed their tag to dump trash in the county. Could this be implemented and would it save money?

Mr. King stated it would be hard to implement because of the enforcement piece but also, it would be difficult with the tourists in the county.

Informational item.

There being no further business, Commissioner Bryson moved to adjourn the meeting. Chairman Letson seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 9:23 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman