

**MINUTES OF A
REGULAR MEETING
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
MAY 20, 2025**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Regular Session on May 20, 2025, 6:42 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Due to the large number of attendees, the meeting was moved to Court Room One.

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	
John W. Smith, Commissioner	

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) **AGENDA**: Chairman Letson requested to reorder the items on the agenda. Commissioner Bryson moved to approve the amended agenda. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(2) **MINUTES**: Commissioner Smith moved to approve the minutes a Public Hearing (UDO) of May 06, 2025; a Regular Meeting of May 06, 2025; and a Work Session of May 06, 2025. Commissioner Jennings seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(3) **CONSENT AGENDA**:

(a) Darlene Fox, Finance Director, presented the Finance Report for April, 2025 for approval.

(b) Brandi Henson, Tax Collector, presented the Tax Collector and Refund Reports for April, 2025, for approval.

Motion: Commissioner Smith moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Hooper seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

(4) **RESOLUTION R25-12 POLICY, PROCEDURES FOR APPOINTMENTS**: Mr. King presented Resolution R25-12 Policy and Procedures for Appointments to county boards and commissions. The Board previously discussed this item and reviewed the resolution at the work session.

Motion: Commissioner Smith moved to approve Resolution R25-12, as presented. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

(5) **RESOLUTION R25-13 EXPENDITURE OF OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUNDS**: Meagan Cagle, Health Education Supervisor and Jodie Rodewald, Substance Use Prevention Coordinator, presented Resolution R25-13 to direct the expenditure of Opioid Settlement Funds. The total dollar amount of Opioid Settlement Funds appropriated across the authorized strategies was \$1,371,314.48.

Motion: Commissioner Bryson moved to approve Resolution R25-13, as presented. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

Chairman Letson stated, regarding the Fontana Regional Library discussions, the Board had not made a decision and they were not going to close any libraries.

(6) INFORMAL COMMENTS BY THE PUBLIC:

- (a) Garrett Craig stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (b) Anne Link stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (c) Diann Catlin stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (d) Bodie Catlin stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (e) Michael Padgett stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (f) Mike Jones stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (g) Tom Downing stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (h) Joseph Ruebel stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (i) Dylan Castle stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (j) Anna Fariello stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (k) Andrew Starostecki stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (l) David Parker stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (m) George Rector stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (n) Betsy Swift stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (o) Danielle Duffy stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (p) Jennifer Hinton stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (q) Beth Baxley stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (r) Autumn stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (s) Kim Mitchell stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (t) John Ritchie stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (u) Michelle Arellanes stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (v) Daniel Shields stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (w) Keith Blaine stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (x) Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (y) Chris Behre stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (z) Richard Litchford stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (aa) Kayla Junaluska stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (bb) Martin Jacaruse stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (cc) John Herrera stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (dd) Travis Russell stated support for the county to exit the FRL.
- (ee) Chris Bogardus stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ff) Mike Yow stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (gg) Casey Walawender stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (hh) Destry Lager stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ii) Patsy Allen stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (jj) Jonathan Bradshaw stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (kk) Charlene Homolka stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ll) Luther Jones stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (mm) Mikaela Shuler stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (nn) Paul Cooper stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (oo) Sarah Steiner stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (pp) Loran Berg stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (qq) Susan Bogardus stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (rr) Skye Cahoon stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ss) Pam Meister stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (tt) Mark Lassiter stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (uu) Patricia Weinert stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (vv) Kathy Roberson stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ww) Kenda Woodburn stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.

- (xx) Ron Robinson stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (yy) Lynda Parlett stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (zz) Jason Kimenker stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (aaa) Pam Buskey stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (bbb) Susan Morgan Leveille stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ccc) Teri Cole-Smith stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ddd) Joy Clark stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (eee) Matt Salerno stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (fff) James Stewart Payne stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (ggg) Adam Bigelow stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.
- (hhh) Erin Callahan stated support for the Library and remaining in the FRL.

Chairman Letson thanked everyone for their comments.

The Board took a five-minute recess.

Chairman Letson called the meeting back to order.

(7) FY25-26 PROPOSED BUDGET: Mr. King stated, in accordance with the North Carolina General Statute 159-11, the proposed budget for 2025-2026 fiscal year was hereby presented for review and consideration. The budget sets forth a plan of operation for all county departments, programs and projects for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. The proposed General Fund Budget was balanced in accordance with the state law with revenues and expenditures totaling \$106,938,560. The proposal constituted an approximate increase of 4.46% (\$4,570,195) over the current FY 2025 amended budget. All proposals within the general fund were based upon a budget with a tax rate of \$0.32 per \$100 of value.

(a) Expenditures Highlights:

- 21.60% Education
- 24.97% Public Safety
- 18.44% Human Services
- 17.08% General Government
- 7.37% Cultural/Recreation
- 4.16% Non-Education Debt
- 3.16% Ec and Phy Dev
- 1.21% Transportation
- 0.10% Environmental Protection
- 1.92% Other/Contingency

(b) Personnel/Insurance: The proposed FY25-26 budget contained personnel recommendations. The recommendations included:

- One step (3.15%, 3.00% or 1.5% based on career path) increase for all employees.
- A 2% Cost of Living adjustment for all employees.
- Worker's Compensation and Liability Insurance.

It was recommended all employees move up one step in the current grade and step plan. This action was necessary to maintain the career path system. Approximately \$1,285,933 was budgeted to implement a one-step increase and a 2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) included in the proposal.

It was recommended the Bonus Leave be changed from 2.5 days to 40 hours per employee. The 40 hours would be available on July 1st for current employees. The newly hired employees would have the leave prorated at the end of each quarter: September 30th = 30 hours; December 31st = 20 hours; March 31st = 10 hours. The leave would not be paid out upon separation. Any unused Bonus Leave would be lost on June 30th.

There were several requests for salary reclassifications and new positions. The following were the recommendations:

- Real Property Revaluation: 2 FTE Real Property Appraiser I; reclassification of a Real Property Appraiser II to a Reappraisal Manager from Grade 22 to Grade 23.
- Elections: 1 FTE Computer and GIS Support Tech I at Grade 20.
- Garage: Reclassification of Mechanic to Mechanic I from grade 20 to Grade 21.
- Grounds: 2 FTE General Utility Worker III.
- Sheriff: 1 FTE Lieutenant School Resource Officer; 1 FTE Evidence Technician and 2 FTE Road Patrol Deputy ACO under a trial basis for one year.
- Jail: Reclassification of Armed Detention Officer to Logistic and Fleet Mgt Sergeant from Grade 21 to Grade 23.
- Code Enforcement: 1 FTE Processing Assistant for the Cashiers Office.
- Planning: Reclassification of Administrative Assistant III to Processing Assistant IV from Grade 17 to Grade 18.
- Health: Reclassification of Medical Office Assistant III to Processing Assistant III from Grade 15 to Grade 16. Reclassification of two Environmental Health Program Coordinators to Environmental Health Program Supervisor I from Grade 25 to Grade 26.
- Social Services: 1 FTE Staff Attorney.
- Veterans: Reclassification of Administrative Assistant II to Veterans Service Officer Grade 16 to Grade 23.
- Recreation: Two Park Attendant 80% positions to 100%. 1 FTE Assistant Recreation Director; 1 FTE Park Attendant.
- Cashiers Recreation: 1 FTE Wellness Coordinator.

Hospitalization/dental insurance premiums would increase by 2%. The employee rates would remain the same. Worker's Compensation Insurance would increase by 2%. Liability Insurance would increase by 2%.

(c) Capital and Capital Improvements: There were capital and capital improvement needs in the amount of \$4,070,140 that should be addressed in FY25-26. The recommendations were as follows:

- Equipment: \$1,514,000. Highlights under this category included computers, servers, printers, software, garage equipment, recreation equipment, law enforcement flock cameras, guns and emergency communication equipment. It was recommended the majority of these expenses be delayed until after the audit was complete.
- Vehicles: \$1,199,324. Highlights under this category included \$576,429 for nine new vehicles at the Sheriff's Office; \$67,386 for a Maintenance replacement truck; \$41,000 for a Housekeeping replacement truck; \$91,492 for a Grounds ton dump truck; \$52,417 for an Emergency Management Expedition; \$35,000 for an Animal Control replacement truck; \$75,000 for two DSS replacement vehicles; \$35,000 for a Recreation Park Attendants truck; and \$225,600 for two Transit Lift Equipped Raised Top Vans.
- Improvements: \$1,356,816. Highlights under this category included Cashiers DOA, Cashiers Library, Cashiers Recreation Center and Jail HVAC upgrades; Cashiers Recreation upgrades and architect fees for building expansion; Skatepark Design and Build; and various other park upgrades. A 10-year Comprehensive Recreation Masterplan was being completed.

(d) Board of Education:

- Current Expense: It was proposed to allocate \$10,771,553 (a 6.6% increase in current expense) to the public schools for FY25-26. This included \$8,509,518 for current operations, \$928,222 in teacher supplements and \$483,813 for counselors. He also recommended continuing the allocation of \$700,000 for CEP lunches at all schools and \$150,000 for the JROTC Program. The School Nurse Program was being funded under the Health Department.

- Capital: 40% of the Article 40 (½ cent) sales tax and 60% of the Article 42 (½ cent) sales tax go to public schools for capital. In FY25-26 the following items were proposed to be funded:
 - Capital Outlay: \$335,000
 - Capital Outlay Technology: \$400,000
 - Capital Outlay One to One: \$320,700
 - Capital Outlay Maintenance: \$375,000 preventative maintenance
 - Capital Outlay Security: \$ 25,000
 - Total: \$1,455,700

It was recommended to budget an additional \$2,974,901 for public school capital expenditures in FY25-26 out of Articles 40 and 42 sales taxes. It was also recommended to budget an additional \$2,889,000 out of the Article 46 sales tax fund to be used for educational purposes. These sales tax funds, future grants and available lottery proceeds would be part of the funding for the Public Schools' FY2025-2029 Facility Capital Improvement Plan.

(e) Southwestern Community College (SCC): It was proposed to allocate \$3,010,437 (a 3% increase of \$96,171) to SCC in current operations for FY25-26.

The proposed general maintenance capital outlay appropriation was \$689,000.

(f) County Libraries: Fontana Regional Library System: It was proposed to allocate \$1,415,000 (a 2% increase of \$32,636) to the Fontana Regional Library System to operate both the Jackson County Library and the Albert Carlton Library.

(g) Other Appropriations: Safety-Fire, Forestry, Rescue, EMS:

- It was proposed that Canada, Savannah and Balsam Volunteer Fire Departments and the Glenville-Cashiers and Jackson County Rescue Squads receive a 5% increase in allocation. Jackson County Rescue Squad had an additional funding amount of \$65,000. Glenville-Cashiers Rescue Squad had an additional funding amount of \$120,000 for the operations of the new substation. Matching funds would be available for equipment purchased under grant funding and on-call payments.
- Balsam Fire Department was being funded an additional \$200,000 for paving of the parking lot. The total allocation was proposed at \$348,141.
- Canada Fire Department was being funded an additional amount of \$41,000 for capital. The total allocation was proposed at \$158,453.
- Cullowhee Fire Department was being funded at \$1,325,550. This would enable the department to increase the paid members on staff 24/7. Mutual aid was provided to other departments within the county. The proposed amount provided enough for 11 full-time fire personnel.
- Qualla Fire Department was being funded at \$1,179,993. Due to the volume of calls, this would enable the department to have paid members on staff 24/7. The District Coordinator positions at the department would be eliminated. Mutual aid was provided to other departments within the county. The proposed funding amount provided enough funding for eight full-time fire personnel.
- Savannah Fire Department was being funded an additional amount of \$70,000 for paving of the parking lot and \$43,000 for capital. The total allocation was proposed at \$280,565.
- Sylva Fire Department was being funded at \$1,187,602. This would enable the department to increase paid members on staff 24/7. Mutual aid was provided to other departments within the county. The proposed funding amount provided enough funding for 10 full-time fire personnel. The Town of Sylva added one additional personnel with town funds to the operations allowing for 11 full-time personnel.
- Glenville-Cashiers contract for ambulance service was recommended to increase to \$1,550,881. This increase included a 3% cost of living adjustment and an additional funding for Station 2.

- Harris EMS contract for ambulance service was recommended to increase to \$2,174,023. This allowed for three additional employees and a Market Adjustment for the employees.
- It was proposed that the Forestry Service receive funding of \$110,066, as requested. This represented a \$26,719 decrease.
- A debt payment of \$350,000 was being recommended for a new Glenville-Cashiers Rescue Squad facility at a cost of \$4,500,000.

(h) CDC and Non-profits: It was proposed the Community Development Center funding remain at \$5,000 due to increased operational costs.

It was proposed that most nonprofits be funded at the current FY24-25 levels. An increased was proposed for AWAKE, Cashiers Chamber of Commerce, Center for Domestic Peace and the HERE Program. New funding was being proposed for Village Green and Vision Cashiers. Mountain Projects request of \$1,500,000 for Webster Village Partnership was recommended to be funded over a two-year period. The final \$750,000 was included in this proposal.

(i) Contingencies: There were multiple contingencies recommended in the proposed budget:

- \$463,962 in contingency for general purposes.
- \$1,563,171 for equipment purchases. This was part of the overall equipment budget discussed earlier that could be delayed until the audit was received.
- \$25,000 for internship/work programs.

(j) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA): Remaining and future funds in these programs would be expended for programs to be decided upon on a case by case basis.

(k) Special Fund Highlights: These funds were separate operating entities from the general fund budget. The general fund budget included transfers to some of these other funds in the amount of \$11,651,218 to support capital projects, recreation and conservation, debt service, the green energy park, economic development, revaluation and school capital reserve. There were additional personnel and capital recommendations in the following summaries:

- **Solid Waste Enterprise Fund:** The Solid Waste FY25-26 proposed operating budget was \$5,614,152. The proposal constituted an approximate increase of 2.62% (\$143,132.39) over the current FY24-25 amended budget. The enterprise fund was funded completely from fees collected for services. Employees within this Fund would receive a one-step pay increase and 2% cost of living adjustment. There were no other major operational changes proposed for FY25-26. He was not proposing an increase in availability fees for the operation.
- **Emergency Telephone (E911) Fund:** The E911 FY25-26 proposed operating budget was \$228,779. The proposal remained the same as the current FY24-25 amended budget. These operations were funded completely through E911 fees. There were no major operational changes proposed for FY25-26.
- **Real Property Revaluation Fund:** The proposed FY25-26 revaluation operating budget was \$656,735. The proposal constituted a decrease over current year operations. Employees within this Fund would receive a one-step pay increase and a 2% cost of living increase. He recommended two new Real Property Appraiser I positions and the reclassification of a Real Property Appraiser II to a Reappraisal Manager. This would allow for an additional team in the field and eliminate all third-party contracts for oversight in the revaluation process. This was the first year of the four-year revaluation cycle for 2029. There were no major operational changes proposed for FY25-26.
- **Green Energy Fund:** The FY25-26 proposed budget was \$454,605. The proposal constituted a 30.96% increase (\$107,472.47) in funding over current FY24-25 budget. Employees within this Fund would receive a one-step pay increase and a 2% cost of living adjustment. New programming and educational opportunities were being proposed for FY25-26.

- Economic Development fund: The FY25-26 proposed budget was \$452,957. The proposal constituted an approximate increase of 25.48% (\$91,983.85) over the current FY24-25 amended budget. One additional position of Economic Development Project Manager had been recommended. The employees within this Fund would receive a one-step pay increase and a 2% cost of living adjustment. A Housing Plan Phase II and Community Connectivity had been proposed for FY25-26.
- Fire Tax Fund: This Fund included both the Highlands Fire and Rescue Operations and the Cashiers-Glenville Volunteer Fire Department.
 - The Highlands Fire and Rescue proposed FY25-26 budget was \$84,000. The proposal constituted the same level of funding from current FY24-25. The fire tax rate was proposed to decrease from \$0.0272 to \$0.150 per \$100 value and would provide the revenues necessary to cover expenses.
 - The Cashiers-Glenville Volunteer Fire Department proposed FY25-26 budget was \$2,770,175. This proposal constituted a 39.66% (\$786,621) increase from the current FY24-25 amended budget. The fire tax rate was proposed to decrease from \$0.0294 to \$0.242 per \$100 value would provide the revenues necessary to cover expenses.
- Other Funds: This category included other funds such as the Capital Reserve Fund, School Capital Reserve Fund (19 and 20), Economic Development Fund (23, 42 and 64), Community Development Fund, Law Enforcement Fund, Conservation Preservation Recreation Fund, Debt Service Fund, Clean Water Revolving Fund, Airport Authority Fund and all active funds.

(l) Fee Schedules: The county operated many services that relied on fees to offset the cost of operations. These fee schedules applied to both the general fund and other fund operations. The fee and rate schedule included the following: Mileage reimbursement rate; Hospital/Dental Insurance Rates; Recreation Center Fees and Charges; Pool Fees and Charges; Senior Center Participants Fee Schedule; Permitting and Code Enforcement Fees; Planning Fees; Health Department Fees; and Solid Waste Fund Fees. It was recommended adjustments be made to the following fee schedules:

- Recreation Department Fees
- General Reimbursement Rate for travel would be established using the current NCOSBM rate schedule
- Mile rate was recommended to increase to the 2024 IRS rate of 67 cents per mile.
- Hospital/Dental Rates – The county’s contribution for employees would increase by 2%. Employee rates would remain the same.
- Solid Waste Availability Fees may remain the same.
- Other minor changes in departmental fee and rate schedules were included in the proposal.

(m) Closing: The public hearing was scheduled for June 03, 2025 at 5:55 p.m. in regards to the proposed budget. The public would be able to examine the proposed budget on the county’s website and hard copies would be available for inspections at the Administration and Finance Departments. The budget was tentatively scheduled to be approved at a Commissioners’ meeting in June 17, 2025, after the Board had the opportunity to make any final adjustments.

Mr. King stated the budget process was never simple or easy. It took time, effort and necessary ability to make hard choices and sometimes unpopular recommendations. They did strive to include all necessary expenditures without the need to increase the tax rate. He thanked all county employees, elected officials and organizations who worked hard to provide the services to the citizens of the county.

As Jackson County did strive to be a leader, it was their responsibility to promote progressive government, sensitive to the needs of its citizens. It was his intent that the proposed budget reflect that commitment to the citizens.

Informational item.

(8) ABC BOARD:

Motion: *Commissioner Bryson moved to reappoint David Noland to serve an additional one-year term as Chair of the ABC Board. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(9) HEALTH BOARD:

Motion: *Commissioner Smith moved to appoint Erin Aiken to serve a three-year term in the veterinarian seat on the Health Board. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried by unanimous vote.*

(10) PRESS CONFERENCE: None.

There being no further business, Commissioner Bryson moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jennings seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 10:55 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman