

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
JUNE 03, 2025**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on June 03, 2025, 6:30 p.m., Southwestern Community College, Balsam Center, Myers Auditorium, 447 College Drive, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Mark A. Letson, Chairman	Kevin King, County Manager
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	John Kubis, County Attorney
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) FONTANA REGIONAL LIBRARY: Mr. King stated at the last work session, the Board requested a Fontana Regional Library (FRL) financial analysis. Using the current budget provided by FRL, he looked at current level staffing and pulled those folks into the county system, which would increase their salary. There were 21 full-time and nine part-time positions. Some employees currently had 401K, which would be for everyone in the county system and would be an increase.

(a) Jackson County Library Projections/Additional Items if the County operated:

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| • Total Library | \$1,516,000 |
| • Network, Computer, Phone Expenses | \$ 200,000 |
| • Vehicle for Staff between libraries | \$ 40,000 |
| • Staff and Benefits – 26 positions | \$1,607,975 |
| • Reduction of Staff and Benefits from FRL | <u>(\$1,298,303)</u> |
| • Additional Operation Cost | \$ 549,672 |
| • Total Operation Cost | \$2,065,672 |

(b) FRL current 54 full-time positions:

- Swain
 - 1 library
 - 3 full-time positions
 - 3 part-time positions
 - Paying \$255,000
- Macon
 - 3 libraries
 - 16 full-time positions
 - 11 part-time positions
 - Paying \$1,200,000
- Jackson
 - 2 libraries
 - 21 full-time positions
 - 9 part-time positions
 - Paying \$1,607,975

Mr. King stated it was hard to quantify because of the FRL salary scale, but the salary analysis based on the current FTE's would be a total budget of \$2 million. This was without any analysis as far as staffing levels or looking at schedules.

FRL and the county were both engaged with Balsam West Fibernet, so it would be a seamless migration from that standpoint. If the Board chose to divest from FRL, he suggested to retain a consultant to walk them through the process with staffing patterns etc.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Bryson inquired about the NC Cardinal Services. Would the county be able to continue to offer those services?

Mr. King stated there was a process to go through during the separation year in order to be awarded. The current cost for the service at the Sylva library was \$4,500 per year. He talked to NC Cardinal and they were receptive to Jackson County going through the process.

Commissioner Bryson asked how much more Jackson County was spending compared to Macon and Swain?

Mr. King stated just looking at the number of libraries per county, Swain was spending \$255,000; Macon was spending \$400,000 per library; and Jackson was spending \$700,000 per library. He noted there were many other variables, including services and programming offered.

Commissioner Bryson stated he believed Macon County should pay their part, along with Swain County. It seemed like a lot less than what Jackson was spending.

Commissioner Smith stated Jackson County was also managing three libraries with less employees than Macon County.

Chairman Letson stated they could not forget the volume that went through one library and part-time employees were not receiving benefits. He did not think they could compare apples to apples when looking at Macon County versus Swain County versus Jackson County. He thought they needed to find another county that was independent to look at.

Commissioner Bryson stated he was talking about the regional agreement. If Jackson County stayed in, the other counties needed to come forward and pay their part.

General discussions were held.

Chairman Letson asked about the volume of people checking out books.

Mr. King stated he did not have that information, but would find out about encounters at each library.

Commissioner Bryson stated he wanted to address the book problem. He thought Mr. Robinson spoke very well about negotiating earlier and coming to an agreement. In an agreement, both sides had to come to the table and be willing, which was why they went down this path.

He would be open to negotiations and seeing how much they would be paying for the libraries. But, in these negotiations, some of these books needed to be moved to the adult section. He was not calling for censorship, book banning or book burning.

He should not have to police his child and keep him away from the book if he did not want him to see it. If it was in the adult section and the parent wanted to check the book out for their child, they had the right to do so. But he did not want his tax dollars going for something like that.

Chairman Letson stated he had reservations about doing any of that. They had worked so hard to maintain the library system for 74 years and they worked so hard to come to an agreement, he felt if they could maintain the agreement without stepping out of the FRL, it was for the betterment of the county. He did feel Macon should be paying more. There was a discrepancy in how the funds were distributed, but there was a lot of programming that went on in the Jackson County libraries that was beneficial to everyone.

It was not on the Board of Commissioners to police these types of materials. There were boards available, it was on the Board of Commissioners to ensure the boards were doing their job. If people had concerns with a book or with a display and they went through the proper channels with no compromise, at that point was when they would go to the Board of Commissioners.

The Commissioners had been elected to appoint people to the boards whether they were for the books or not, they were there to serve as the county's capacity. If there was an issue with something, that was where it needed to be handled, the Commissioners were not there to handle that. They were there to make sure the county was getting the best dollar for dollar on their library system and ensure the materials were available to anyone who wanted a library card. That was their job. That was where he stood.

Commissioner Bryson stated he agreed on some of what Chairman Letson stated. He thought it was their job also to make sure these dollars were spent how the majority of the county wanted them spent. The library system had been a benefit to the county for many, many years. There would be nothing wrong with them having some type of discussion and negotiation and ask for these books that were in question by Jackson County residents, moved to the adult section.

Chairman Letson asked if it would be prudent for the Board to request a joint meeting with the Fontana Regional Library Board so they could directly ask questions and get non-emotional answers to the issues some were having. He thought the next step should be a joint meeting that was open to the public.

Commissioner Bryson stated he thought that was what negotiation looked like, but FRL had to be willing to negotiate and willing to compromise.

Commissioner Smith stated thus far FRL had not been willing on that subject.

Chairman Letson stated the Commissioners had to be willing to negotiate and compromise as well. If they could find that compromise, he thought they would be in better shape as a county.

Commissioner Jennings stated that was what everyone wanted all along.

Consensus: *Mr. King to arrange a joint meeting with the Fontana Regional Library Board.*

(2) **OTHER BUSINESS:** Mr. King stated he received a request from Vision Cashiers to allow them to place permanent displays of public artwork on county property in two locations along the trail they were developing in Cashiers. The artwork included a sculpture of a gymnast and sculptures of deer. He presented the request for the Board's consideration.

Chairman Letson stated the locations were at the main entrance of the rec center pavilion and between the dog park and Frank Allen Road. Vision Cashiers had been doing a lot of artwork around the community on their ramble.

Consensus: *Allow the placement of the artwork on county property, as requested by Vision Cashiers.*

There being no further business, Commissioner Smith moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman