

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

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Special Budget Work Session on June 06, 2025, 9:00 a.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present: Mark A. Letson, Chairman (Via Zoom)	Kevin King, County Manager
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
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) SOUTHWESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE: Dr. Don Tomas, SCC President thanked the Commissioners for their support. He thanked Mr. King, Ms. Fox and SCC, who helped develop a budget to provide the services necessary for SCC to operate and for capital projects. SCC had been a major economic development driver in the county and within the region.

General discussions were held.

Four years ago, the Commissioners provided SCC with a contingency fund. The line item was mistakenly left out of the FY2025-26 budget request. He requested consideration to expand the budget an additional \$83,000 to continue with the contingency.

Informational item.

(2) PUBLIC SCHOOLS: Dr. Dana Ayers, Superintendent, presented the 2025-2026 Funding Request Deficits:

<u>JCPS 2025-2026 Funding Request</u>	<u>Initial Request</u>	<u>County Proposed</u>	<u>Deficit</u>
Operations	\$8,201,622	\$8,509,518	
Supplement	\$1,664,541	\$928,222	\$736,319
Counselors	\$595,466	\$483,813	
JROTC Personnel and Equipment	\$220,904	\$150,000	
Costs exceed state allotments	<u>\$983,460</u>	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$983,460</u>
Total Operations Budget Requests	\$11,665,993	\$10,071,553	
Total Deficit			\$1,719,779
CEP Lunches All School SN Budget	\$700,000	\$700,000	
Charter Schools JCPS as a passthrough entity	\$1,500,000		
Jackson Community School HVAC and Fire Alarm system	\$500,000		
2025-26 Total Request	\$14,185,993		

General discussions were held.

Dr. Ayers stated they would work with Ms. Fox's office on different scenarios for the supplement.

Commissioner Smith stated he wanted to see the JROTC Program fully funded.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

The Board took a ten-minute recess.
Chairman Letson called the meeting back to order.

(3) SHERIFF'S OFFICE: Sheriff Doug Farmer stated public safety was in the forefront of everyone's minds and they wanted to provide the best for the citizens. He requested consideration for the following:

(a) PLC System: In September 2024, they started having issues with the PLC/Intercom/video system in the jail. They had put patches on it and had new video cameras waiting to be installed. On average, there were three PLC failures per week. If the system failed, inmates would have to be moved from the facility. The new system would cost in excess of \$200,000.

General discussions were held.

(b) Detention Officers: The Detention Officers worked hard and were under appreciated. From January 1, 2022 to February 2024, they had a 95% turnover. He wanted the officers to start at Deputy pay at Grade 22 and be able to go up the ranks as well.

Ms. Fox stated the total amount for the request would be \$81,802.

General discussions were held.

(c) Holiday Pay: With the schedules and being 24/7/365, officers were never able to take their time off and were constantly getting overtime and comp time. Most officers did not get to take holidays off.

Ms. Fox stated the total amount for the request would be \$214,096.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(4) BUDGET DISCUSSIONS:

(a) Chairman Letson stated two nonprofits he wanted to discuss were Village Green and Vision Cashiers. The capital outlay request was for \$425,000 and it was recommended for \$137,000. He felt they needed to meet the \$425,000, but thought they could pull from Vision Cashiers because of the delay within what they were trying to accomplish.

Village Green requested the \$425,000 because they had a match from TDA for a public bathroom facility at the Village Green. Last year, they requested \$137,000 for the Pinnacle Master Plan. All of the nonprofits were in line with what they were last year.

Mr. King stated staff would circle back with Vision Cashiers and Village Green.

General discussions were held.

(b) Commissioner Hooper asked about the Appalachian Women's Museum request for \$10,000.

Mr. King stated the funds were used for building maintenance and utilities.

(c) Commissioner Bryson asked if they saw an increase in services in the HERE Program?

Mr. King stated they were asking for additional funds for a cost of living adjustment. They also had challenges with housing. It was proposed to provide an additional \$5,000 over FY2024-25.

Ms. Fox stated HERE provided a list of services they were going to provide differently next year, but at that time, they were planning on providing a shelter.

(d) Commissioner Bryson asked about the Center for Domestic Peace increase.

Ms. Fox stated the increase was for new facility operations.

(e) Commissioner Bryson stated historically, the Cashiers Chamber of Commerce amount was \$15,000. Was there a reason for the increase?

Ms. Fox stated it was to help with their expenses.

(f) Chairman Letson requested Mr. King state for the public, why there was an increase in expenditures.

Mr. King stated they had over \$100 million in projects ongoing. Debt service would be \$2,595,500, with two additional one million-dollar allocations for those projects for a total of \$4,595,000.

There was a \$643,000 increase for the school system and \$167,000 for SCC. Plus, Government Operations; CPR Fund; Nonprofit Grants; COLA and Benefits; additional ambulance and rescue services of \$873,756; and Sheriff's Office \$665,934.

Also, Public Safety for Fire at \$1,623,190, including one department going to 24/7 with eight firemen; adding additional personnel at Sylva and Cullowhee. Allocations to the Greenway Fund of \$750,000. For a total of \$12,917,686.

In the initial budget statement, the neutral rate was not publicized because the Board of Equalization and Review was not yet complete. They would provide an accurate number to them on June 9th. He provided the newspaper with the number of 26.91 based on preliminary numbers giving additional revenue after growth had been taken into consideration, of \$10,270,000. This was the actual number they would anticipate for the millage increase of between 26.91 and 32.

Commissioner Smith requested to receive information for call volume for each fire department.

(g) Ms. Fox stated the Glenville-Cashiers Rescue Squad also requested an additional \$60,000 in their budget allocation for operations, which staff did not initially recommend. They did include an additional \$120,000 for operating costs for their new building.

(h) Commissioner Jennings asked about the Green Energy Fund proposal 31% over last year's budget.

Mr. King stated Green Energy wanted to reinvent their business plan. With their donated equipment, they wanted to build a ceramics lab. The long-term vision would be to be more self-sustaining.

(i) Commissioner Jennings stated with the Sheriff and school requests and what the county needed, it was going to drive the budget up more, so they would have to cut in other areas.

Commissioner Hooper stated she agreed.

Commissioner Jennings stated if revenue neutral was .27, he thought they were going to be more at .33, if they add fire, EMS, etc.

Mr. King stated out of the five-cent increase, 2.5 cents would go towards the debt the Board indicated they were moving forward with. Another part was the Cost of Living Adjustment and Step Plan for employees, which was keeping competitive in the workforce. Also, public safety did go up, including an increase for EMS Service, the Sheriff's Office and Fire. They were also looking at the Greenway.

Commissioner Hooper suggested putting off the Greenway until next year.

Ms. Fox stated the Greenway Fund had \$1,428,000 with one property that had not closed, which would leave approximately \$1,000,000.

(j) Commissioner Bryson stated Qualla did deserve their full-time people.

Commissioner Smith asked how many positions they were paying to add in Sylva?

Ms. Fox stated two positions.

Commissioner Jennings stated he did not understand how the fire tax was fair in Cashiers.

Mr. King stated the community wanted extra fire protection and control of their budget. There was a grass root initiative to have the service tax implemented in 2012.

General discussions were held.

(k) Commissioner Smith asked to revisit the school system request for additional supplement for the certified and noncertified staff.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Smith stated he wanted to see JROTC fully funded.

Commissioner Jennings asked about having the JROTC Program at Blue Ridge.

Dr. Ayers stated there would have to be a student interest survey. By the end of three full years, they had to have 10% of student population engaged and would have to be maintained over time. Surveys were done at Blue Ridge, but JROTC had never been an interest.

General discussions were held.

(l) Commissioner Bryson stated he wanted to see the system updated for the jail.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

There being no further business, Commissioner Hooper moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 11:47 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman