

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
JANUARY 06, 2026**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on January 06, 2026, 7:28 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

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

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS: Paul Taylor of the Disabled American Veterans Chapter 89, stated the Chapter was in charge of Haywood, Jackson and Swain Counties, but may add more in the near future. Their motto was “veterans helping veterans”. Any veteran in the three counties could contact their Veteran Service Officer or contact Disabled American Veterans directly for assistance. Also, during Christmas, they visited all the nursing homes in the three counties. They were also active with the ROTCs in the high schools. They were appreciative of the funding from the county each year.

General discussions were held.
Informational item.

(2) VISION CASHIERS: Paul Robshaw, President, presented: The Future of Cashiers is Walkable.

(a) For more than 30 years, Cashiers had championed the need for safe, connected walkability. Guided by a master plan from award winning Equinox Environmental, Walk Cashiers and Vision Cashiers was expanding the Cashiers Greenway Ramble (CGR). The work directly aligned with the 2022 Urban Land Institute (ULI) Advisory Report, which identified connected network of pathways, sidewalks and trails as critical to Cashiers’ future.

(b) Now open 2.3 miles of trail. An expanded CGR of 5+ miles would link businesses, youth spaces and cultural assets, reducing congestion and providing safe passage for residents, shoppers, students and tourists across Cashiers.

The master plan reflects “smart village” features, including WiFi, lighting, 911 access, pocket parks, educational features, public art, crosswalks and informational kiosks.

Proposed paths offer variety, including universally/ADA accessible paths for those with limited abilities, casual strolling trails and challenging fitness opportunities.

(c) One Step at a time. A timeline of Walkability:

- 1993 Village Conservancy founded to address issues including pathways.
- Early 2000s local business owners led by Bob Dews fund the first Cashiers Walking Trail.
- 2018-2020 Vision Cashiers (previously Village Conservancy) secured funding and hired Equinox Environmental to develop CGR Master Plan with community input.

- 2022 the Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce sponsored a ULI Advisory Services Panel, funded by local donors, confirmed widespread community support for walkability. The Walk Cashiers campaign was launched.
- 2024 Thomas Taulbee Memorial Entrance opened the first mile of the updated CGR to the public.
- (d) Safe paths. Shared spaces. Smart design.
 - Pocket parks with unique features
 - Convenient parking
 - A Smart Village with WiFi, lighting and 911 access
 - Art nodes featuring works by regional artists
 - More connected community
- (e) Create a lasting legacy. Naming opportunities were available.
- (f) Beyond walkability, building community connectivity:
 - Drives vitality
 - Sustains beauty
 - Strengthens sense of place
- (g) The future: raised \$2.9M of the \$4.9M needed to complete the trail

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(3) **AWAKE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER**: Crystal Jones, Executive Director, presented:

- (a) Forensic Interviews:
 - At AWAKE, trained forensic interviewers conducted child friendly interviews.
 - Forensic interviews limited the number of times a child must talk about their abuse.
- (b) Child Medical Evaluation:
 - A contracted AWAKE healthcare provider performed child medical exams in the privacy of the center.
 - The exams were a head-to-toe examination to ensure the health and wellbeing of every child.
 - AWAKE'S nurse practitioner was rostered with the NC Child Medical Evaluation Program and was a certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner.
- (c) Case Management/Victim Advocacy:
 - Case Managers guided families through the entire process.
 - They helped provide resources from the center or find outside resources and connect with the families regularly until services were no longer needed.
 - AWAKE's Victim Advocates were also bilingual.
- (d) Onsite Counseling:
 - Mental health providers offered trauma focused counseling.
 - This offered an alternative and confidential environment for children to recover from abuse.
- (e) Multi-Disciplinary Team: The core of the Children's Advocacy Center and ensured each child's needs were met. AWAKE coordinated meeting monthly to discuss current child care cases in the county:
 - AWAKE
 - District Attorney
 - Law Enforcement Agencies
 - DSS
 - Medical and Mental Health Providers

- School Counselors
 - Juvenile Justice
- (f) Community Outreach: provide free training, programs and presentations to schools, clubs and civic groups.
- (g) Statistical trends from FY 2024-25:
- Significant growth in total and new individuals served, indicating increased demand and outreach
 - Sharp rise in personal advocacy services, especially individual advocacy and forensic exams/interviews
 - Shift toward older child victims (7-17 years) and more female new clients
 - Victimization, particularly sexual and physical abuse, increased substantially
 - Emotional support saw a major shift increase in crisis intervention and counseling
 - 62.8% increase in total individuals served
 - 28% increase in new individuals served
- (h) Funding percentages for AWAKE in the county:
- VOCA continued to decrease funding allowance for CACs nationwide
 - \$26,244 shortfall

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(4) **MOUNTAIN TRUE**: Callie Moore, Western Regional Director, presented:

- (a) Mountain True championed resilient forests, clean water and healthy communities in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains.
- (b) Improved Water Quality:
- Volunteer water quality monitoring program (Adopt-A-Stream)
 - Swim Guide
 - Landowner technical assistance
 - Stream and riparian restoration projects
 - Grants for septic system repair
 - Managing stormwater
- (c) Protecting and Restoring Forests:
- Review timber sale projects on both Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests
 - Nonnative invasive plant inventory/control
 - Participate in the Fire Learning Network
 - Forest planning, Nantahala Pisgah Forest Partnership
- (d) Healthy Communities:
- Local/regional land use and transportation planning efforts
 - Steep slope and other sustainable development ordinances
 - Greenways, sidewalks and bicycle paths
 - Affordable/workforce housing
- (e) Recent work in the county:
- Assisting/supporting partner organizations
 - Sicklesfin Redhorse Conservation Working Group
 - Little Tennessee Native Fish Conservation Area Partnership
 - Blue Ridge Snorkel Trail
 - Microplastics water quality monitoring
 - Fiscal agent and project manager for development of Headwaters Conservation Plan

- Habitat restoration:
 - East LaPorte Park
 - Future riverside park in Cullowhee
 - Pinnacle Park
 - Greenway
 - Educational walks/talks with Friends of the Greenway in 2026
- (f) Request for funding \$5,000 to support continued habitat restoration and education events on the Greenway.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(5) CIRCLES OF JACKSON COUNTY: Dawn Neatherly, Executive Director, stated the mission of Circles was to provide short and long-term support that enabled individuals and families to move into self-sustainability. They did this through education, employment readiness assistance and a creation of community support systems. Their ultimate goal was to reduce the number of families in poverty in the county. Their two-step process was an 18-month commitment.

As a nonprofit organization, they were fully funded by grants and donations. They requested funds would help enabled them to provide crucial resources, guidance and opportunities for individuals to reach self-sufficiency. She thanked the community and county for continued support.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(6) ARTS COUNCIL: Brian Huneycutt, President, presented: The Arts were alive in the mountains.

(a) The heart of the mission: Founded in 1976 to enrich the county through arts. Dedicated to youth, artists and community creativity.

(b) Arts matter:

- Arts education boots creativity, confidence and learning outcomes in youth
- Cultural programs strengthen community bonds across generations
- Arts drove economics vitality by supporting local artists and events

(c) Impact so far:

- \$325,000 invested in local arts
- Rotunda Gallery year-round exhibitions featuring local and regional artists

(d) A movement:

- Revenue: NC arts and cultural nonprofits created \$233 billion in economic activities
- Job and income increases: The arts and cultural nonprofit sector was responsible for:
 - Over 37,000 jobs
 - Over \$15 billion in income for NC residents
 - \$439 million in local, state and federal government revenues

(e) Core programs:

- Grant and Sponsorships: artists, nonprofits, community groups
- Youth Arts Education: School residencies, Junior Appalachian Musicians scholarships
- Exhibitions and Events: Rotunda Gallery rotations, cultural programming
- Artists Development: training, exposure, professional support

(f) Partnerships and Community Reach:

- Strong connections with NC Arts Council and the County Board of Commissioners
- Deep roots in Sylva and surrounding communities
- Serving schools, nonprofits, businesses and artists

(g) The future:

- Expand grants to reach more local artists
- Strengthen youth programs and inspire the next generation
- Build regional recognition for the county as a creative hub
- Enhance community programming with variety of events

(h) Support:

- Support ensures sustainable growth
- Every donation was a direct investment in Youth Education, Artist empowerment and cultural vitality of the county

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(7) **FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY**: Mary Otto Selzer, presented:

(a) Public Library Complex, honoring the past, embracing the future:

- 1983 – JC’s 6400 sf library built in 1970 had outgrown its space
- 1988 - historic courthouse was condemned
- 2003 - Southwestern Community College proposed building a combined library.
- 2004 - joint JC & Sylva committee formed to evaluate potential JCPL sites
- 2007 - JC Commissioners hired architectural firm to look at the courthouse & see if it would make a good library site.
- 2007 - Library Needs Assessment was commissioned

(b) Dubberly Garcia Associates Needs Assessment May 28, 2007

- Top four priorities:
 - Satisfies curiosity, lifelong learning
 - Create young readers, early literacy
 - Visit a comfortable place, physical and virtual spaces
 - Stimulate imagination, reading, viewing and listening for pleasure
- New Library Complex Highlights:
 - Large community room, conference, study, tutor rooms
 - Expanded children’s area
 - Dedicated teen area
 - Increased internet/wireless access
 - Extensive increase in collections
 - Exhibit, gallery and performance space

(c) The Library breathed new life into the courthouse: October, 2007, the Commissioners voted to restore the historic courthouse and incorporate it into the new Public Library Complex. The courthouse would become an integral part of the community again as an anchor for the much needed new library.

(d) Fundraising Feasibility Study – Sims & Steele Consulting:

- The Friends had raised over \$140,000 over the past decade for a new library
- 79 individuals across the county were interviewed
 - 81% awareness and passion for the project
 - 91% strong case for support
 - 93% would make a financial gift
 - Caution was advised as citizen attitudes should not be overestimated. It would take a lot of work to make this project a financial priority
 - “The issue of ‘the economy’ was repeatedly mentioned as a cause for concern.” US stock market had just lost 50% of its value.

- \$1.5 million was feasible
- (e) Incorporating the historic courthouse into a new library complex allowed them to honor one of the most recognized symbols of the county by making it a part of one of the most important institutions of the county – the public library.
- (f) To make the new library complex a reality:
- Commissioners committed over \$8 million
 - The Capital Campaign lead by the Friends, & supported by the Genealogy Society, Historical Association and the Arts Council developed a plan to raise the \$1.5 million
 - With a goal of raising at least \$1 million by the official groundbreaking.
 - Over \$1.8 million was raised
 - 1000+ donors contributed from 21 states across the country
 - Gifts ranged from piggy banks filled with coins to \$250,000 given by the SECU Foundation
 - The county was the largest provider of funds at over \$8 million
- (g) Request the county renew the lease related to the Public Library Complex to continue to meet the needs and expectations of the community.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(8) OTHER BUSINESS: None.

There being no further business, Commissioner Hooper moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Bryson seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman