

**MINUTES OF A
WORK SESSION
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
FEBRUARY 03, 2026**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Work Session on February 03, 2026, 7:19 p.m., Justice and Administration Building, Room A201, 401 Grindstaff Cove Road, Sylva, North Carolina.

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

Chairman Letson called the meeting to order.

(1) TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY: Nick Breedlove, Executive Director, Tourism Development Authority (TDA), presented: TCPF Applications:

(a) Pinnacle Park Trail Expansion:

- Pinnacle Park Master Plan Implementation Phase Two:
 - Project goal: Upgrade critical infrastructure and accessibility to support sustainable growth.
 - Total project costs: \$682,645
 - TCPF grant request: \$341,322
 - Matching funds: \$341,323 PARTF Grant 100% secured
 - Local investment: 100% of costs expected to be spent within the community
- Critical infrastructure and visitor facilities:
 - Paved trailhead: Construction of an 18-space parking lot, one bus space, with stone stacked retention wall and professional signage
 - Enhanced facilities: Installation of a single stall vault toilet and high durability trash receptacles.
 - Educational assets: Construction of an outdoor classroom to serve school groups and university researchers.
 - Sustainability: The Town of Sylva committed \$20,000 annually for routine maintenance.
- Expanding access for all visitors:
 - ADA accessible trail: 303-linear-foot accessible section leading to a viewing platform with interpretive signage.
 - Target demographics: Specifically improves access for seniors, families and individuals with movement limitations.
 - Backcountry expansion: Development of 5,940 linear feet of new hiking trails.
 - Campsite upgrades: Significant improvements to existing backcountry campsites.
- Driving growth for the county:
 - Annual visitation: 20% Increase
 - Overnight stays: 2,300 new bookings / 6,342 new room nights annually
 - Lodging revenue: \$976,000 in new annual revenue
 - Total direct spending: \$1,857,000 annually
 - Job Support: Bolsters 1,440 full-time jobs in the outdoor economy

(b) The Village Green Restrooms:

- Rebuild and expand public restrooms:
 - Total project cost: \$675,000
 - TCPF grant request: \$204,000
 - Match secured: \$425,000 from the county and \$46,000 in Private Donations
 - Organization: The Village Green of Cashiers Inc. (501(c)(3) nonprofit)
 - Economic efficiency: 100% of project costs would be spent locally
- The critical infrastructure gap:
 - Sole provider: Only public restroom facility in the Cashiers Commercial District.
 - Outdated facility: Existing building was over 20 years old, deteriorating and unheated.
 - Capacity bottleneck: Offered only two unisex toilets to serve thousands of visitors during peak festivals.
 - Winter limitations: Lacked heat and running water in winter, forcing reliance on a single portable toilet.
 - The problem: The permanent porta-potty situation created a negative impression for winter visitors.
- Project scope and upgrades:
 - Objective: Show the high-quality, year-round solution being proposed.
 - Expanded capacity: Increase from two to six toilets, plus a separate baby changing area.
 - Year-round access: Fully winterized and heated construction for 12-month use.
 - Universal accessibility: Full ADA compliance for seniors and individuals with mobility challenges.
 - Major infrastructure: Replacement of a critical 18-inch culvert and installation of a new 400A electrical service.
 - Design: Matches the town's village aesthetic with a professional 30-year expected lifespan.
- Tourism and economic impact:
 - Annual visitation: 35,000 (2024) → 37,000 projected (2026)
 - Community events: Supported 275+ free annual events (e.g., Leaf Festival)
 - Room nights: Supported an estimated 16,000 room nights annually
 - Business support: Reduced operational strain on private shops/restaurants
 - Strategic goal: Encourages longer stays and repeat visitation to nearby retailers

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(2) APPALACHIAN WOMEN'S MUSEUM: Danielle Duffy, Operations Manager, Appalachian Women's Museum (AWM), presented:

(a) Monteith Farmstead was built in 1908 and occupied by one family Elias Brendel Monteith and his wife, Mary Magdalene Carson, along with their two daughters Edna Corrine and Edith Irene. The two sisters spent their entire lives in the home and had no heirs. When Edith passed away in 2001, the property moved through the hands of her caretakers to the Town of Dillsboro.

A group of concerned citizens saw the beauty and history of the farmstead. They negotiated with the Town of Dillsboro to secure the property and applied for a National Historic Registry. The volunteers dedicated hundreds of hours working with local businesses, the Town of Dillsboro and the county to save the house and surrounding structures.

(b) The mission of the Appalachian Women's Museum: To gather, preserve and share the stories of Southern Appalachian Women past, present and future.

(c) AWM were stewards of the historic building and provided life-long learning space that encouraged community conversations about Southern Appalachian Heritage.

(d) Over the years they had installed a new roof, stabilized the structure, electrical and plumbing work – connecting to TWSA. They installed an HVAC system, fixed flooring, installed internet service and more. They continued to make the house more energy efficient. That year they would look at updating electrical outlets and lighting. In the future, they hoped to expand their outdoor space and indoor space.

(e) Events included:

- Victory Garden: Similar to those planted by Appalachian women during WWII and just after. The garden was planted, maintained and harvested by volunteers. The food and flowers grown were donated to United Christian Ministries in aid to neighbors.
- Music on the Porch: Music on the Porch was an annual benefit event celebrating mountain music and Appalachian traditions.
- Airing of the Quilts: A traditional rite of spring in the mountains. After a long winter with families snuggled under layers of warm handmade quilts, the warmer weather of springtime gave women a chance to freshen up and air-out these essentials covers.
- Pumpkin Decorating
- K-12 Activities

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(3) CENTER FOR DOMESTIC PEACE: Thom Brooks, Executive Director, Center for Domestic Peace, presented:

(a) Center for Domestic Peace (CDP):

- A 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that takes a holistic, community focused approach towards ending interpersonal violence in Jackson County.
- CDP provided a wide variety of services to those experiencing interpersonal violence in the community.
- 24-Hour Safeline
- Domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking services.

(b) CDP History Highlights:

- 2012: REACH of Macon County begins providing domestic violence services to Jackson County
- 2016: CDP was formed to address the ongoing need for services in Jackson County. This was done in partnership with REACH of Macon County.
- 2020: The first Executive Director was hired and CDP begins providing Domestic Violence services independent of REACH of Macon County.
- 2022: Sexual Assault Services were provided at CDP making it a fully independent dual agency.
- 2023: Planning for the new shelter was underway with funding from Jackson County and Dogwood Health Trust.
- 2026: The new emergency shelter would open as a refuge for survivors of interpersonal violence.

(c) CDP Served:

- 86% female, 14% male
- Ages: 28% 30-39; 24% 50+; 24% 18-29; 17% 40-49; 7% under 18

- (d) Services offered:**
 - 24-Hour Crisis Intervention and Response
 - Emergency Shelter
 - Court Advocacy
 - Individual and Group Therapy
 - Information and Referrals
 - Outreach and Prevention
- (e) 24/7 Safeline:**
 - Free and confidential access to victim advocacy
 - Assistance with emergency shelter needs
 - Danger assessments, safety planning and next steps
 - Sexual assault hospital response and accompaniment
 - Resource distribution and referrals
- (f) Intervention and Response Victim Advocacy:**
 - CDP staff provide direct client services support survivors of interpersonal violence
 - Specialized advocacy from Bilingual, Court, Housing and Outreach/Prevention Advocates
 - Sexual Assault Advocate works with survivors in coordination with community partners
 - All Advocates assess needs, validate experiences, plan safety and provide resources
 - CDP Advocacy was trauma-informed and grounded in the Empowerment Model
- (g) Emergency Shelter:**
 - CDP provides temporary emergency housing for those fleeing interpersonal violence
 - Presently using hotels and partner agencies
 - New Emergency Shelter would accommodate up to 18 persons
- (h) Court Advocacy:**
 - Court accompaniment for clients
 - Assistance in filing Domestic Violence Protection Orders and No Contact Orders in state and tribal courts
 - Track updates during court proceedings to ensure clients were aware of changes and outcomes
 - Maintain knowledge of civil and criminal court procedures and policy changes
 - Provide clients with relevant court updates:
 - Upcoming court dates
 - Defendant arrest information
 - Plea agreements and case developments
 - Facilitate and participate in monthly meetings with the District Attorney's Office
 - Communicate client desired outcomes and concerns to the DA
 - Track and maintain valid Release of Information (ROIs) to communicate with the DA, Legal Aid and other counsel
- (i) Counseling and Therapy:**
 - Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivors Support Groups
 - In House Therapist
 - Free counseling for survivors of interpersonal violence
 - Referrals to free licensed therapists and counselors
 - Spanish speaking counselors and therapist referrals
 - Children 13 and under
 - WNC Alliance in Waynesville

(j) Outreach and Prevention:

- Emphasis on prevention, education and community outreach
- Educational presentations on healthy relationships, consent, internet safety, interpersonal violence and CDP services
- Schools, WCU, SCC and other partners
- WCU campus outreach including tabling events and group collaborations
- Participation in community groups, events and awareness initiatives

(k) Annual Impact:

- Intervention:
 - Served 312 survivors
 - Provided 3,091 services
 - Answered 343 Safeline calls
 - Utilized 2,881 volunteer hours
- Shelter and Housing:
 - Sheltered 22 people
 - 445 nights of safety
 - Housed 17 people in Safe at Home
- Advocacy:
 - 102 survivor safety plans
 - 153 danger assessments
 - 101 survivors provided with financial and job assistance
- Court Advocacy:
 - 185 survivors interacting with the justice system
 - Assisted with 102 Domestic Violence Protective Orders
 - Made 29 mandatory reports to DSS

(l) Operations:

- 42% Federal Grants
- 21% Other Grants
- 16% State Grants
- 12% Donations and Local Grants
- 9% County

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(4) **CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**: Todd Vineyard, Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce, presented:

- (a) Working to keep and make the county a great place to live, work and visit.
- (b) A strong Chamber means a strong county.
- (c) Served every corner of the county's economy:
 - Businesses
 - Students
 - Community Partners
 - Visitors
 - Families
- (d) They were the front door to the county.

- (e) The Chamber operated the county Visitor Center:
 - Accurate, friendly visitor information
 - High quality maps, guides and digital resources
 - A positive first impression of the county
 - Increased tourism spending that strengthened the tax base
- (f) Support and strengthened local businesses:
 - Business coaching and referrals
 - Marketing and visibility support
 - Networking and collaboration opportunities
- (g) Build workforce pathways with WCU and SCC:
 - Host employer roundtables
 - Support internships and job readiness programs
 - Strengthen partnerships that retain young talent
 - Two scholarships at SCC and WCU
- (h) Create community through events and partnerships:
 - Concerts on the Creek
 - Holiday celebrations
 - Community gatherings bring residents together and generate real economic activity
- (i) Help shape smart, sustainable growth from Highway 107 redevelopment to countywide business recruitment, the Chamber played a critical role in:
 - Sharing clear, accessible information
 - Supporting businesses during construction
 - Attracting new investment
 - Promoting thoughtful, community aligned development
- (j) The return on investment: A county contribution to the Chamber delivered measurable value:
 - Stronger local businesses
 - Increased tourism revenue
 - A more prepared workforce
 - Improved community engagement
 - A unified voice for economic development

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(5) REFLECTIONS OF INSPIRATION: DeMakus Staton, Director and Lisa Wells, Director of Engagement, Reflections of Inspiration, were in present for this item.

Mr. Staton presented: Funding impact report and year three community investment proposal:

(a) A non-profit organization dedicated to empowering community groups and organizations through education, advocacy and capacity-building programs that strengthened families and communities.

ROI was recognized as a Dual Tribal Domestic and Sexual Violence Coalition, serving federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Mexico. Families, tribal nations and rural communities across the county and the United South and Eastern Tribes depend on access to safety, education and trusted support systems.

(b) Mission: Strengthen communities by engaging its members with positive support.

(c) Services:

- Trainings and Education
- Technical Assistance
- Community Support
- Advocacy Work

Ms. Wells presented:

(d) Year One Funding: Laying the Foundation:

- Supported ROI in expanding its capacity to serve the county.
- Completed Peer Support Specialist training: Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) Level I, a program focused on prevention and wellness strategies to help individuals get well, stay well and create the lives they want through structured tools and action plans.
- Completed WRAP Level II training and earned certification as a WRAP Facilitator. The WRAP was a structured, evidence-informed and person-centered approach that helped individuals identify tools, supports and strategies to maintain wellness and respond effectively to life's challenges. WRAP empowers participants to create a personalized plan based on their strengths, cultural values and lived experiences, promoting self-advocacy, resilience and long-term well-being.

(e) Year Two: Expanding Community Impact:

- ROI would host a Sexual Assault Awareness Event focused on educating the community about what constitutes sexual assault, recognizing warning signs and understanding the importance of consent.
- The event would teach boundary-setting, healthy relationships and personal safety. Participants would learn how to protect themselves and others from harm through awareness and informed decision-making.
- Community members would learn about mutual consent, respect and bystander intervention. These tools empower participants to prevent assault and support individuals at risk. Prevention efforts help break cycles of violence and create safer environments.

(f) It takes a Village to Raise Awareness:

- This event brings together families, students, local colleges, community leaders and neighbors to raise awareness, share resources and promote prevention through education & connection.
- By coming together, they could highlight awareness, encourage prevention and strengthen the support systems that helped the community thrive.

(g) Proposed Funding Request: Annual Event:

- Making this an annual event which would make communities stronger, enforcing safety, promotes education and empowers individuals with knowledge and resources.
- Benefits:
 - Educate the Community
 - Promote Health Relationships and Consent
 - Builds Prevention Skills
 - Break Silence and Reduce Stigma
 - Strengthen Community Support Networks
 - Demonstrate Community Commitment to Safety

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(6) SOUTHWESTERN CHILD DEVELOPMENT: Mandy Mills, Executive Director and Stephanie Lovedahl, Director of Employee Relations and Compensation, Southwestern Child Development, were present for this item.

Ms. Mills presented:

(a) Background: A non-profit agency, operating since 1972. While they no longer operated childcare centers, were main on the front lines advocating for funding, training and technical assistance for childcare providers. They administered child subsidy programs for families and offer parenting classes for parents of young children. They also offered a Nurse Family Partnership, where registered nurses work with first-time moms and families until the child turned two.

- (b) Project/Agency goal: Restoration of the Old Rock School:
- Office Rentals at a Discounted Rate
 - Dog Park
 - Health Fairs
 - Community Center
 - Event rental indoor and outdoor
 - Commissary Kitchen
 - Continue to be a Voting Precinct for Webster Community
 - Fun Activities for Families
 - Parenting Classes
 - Distribution Hub
 - Training for Childcare Providers

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(7) **THE VILLAGE GREEN**: Dale Gordon, Executive Director and Mattilynn Sneed, Programming and Facilities Manager, The Village Green, were present for this item.

Ms. Gordon presented:

(a) 2025 projects completed:

- Village Play Renovation: Fully ADA accessible facility
- Campus wide GEO Mapping: allowed them to see all lines and share with public service

(b) 2026 Planning:

- Trail repaving needs: exposed roots, tripping hazards, broken chip and seal. They were approved for the Great Trails State Program Grant and they received agency approval.
- New public restrooms and storage: Over 20 year old facility in need of renovation, including an ADA accessible restroom. This was a huge asset to the community as it was the only public restrooms in the Cashiers Commercial Area.

Ms. Sneed presented:

(c) The Heart of Cashiers: The 13+ acre park was not only centrally located in the heart of the village, but it also served as a vibrant hub for free community events and gatherings:

- Home Grown on the Green
- Easter on the Green
- Groovin' on the Green
- Fireworks Extravaganza
- Cashiers Valley Leaf Festival
- Goblins on the Green
- Gobble on the Green
- Lights on the Green

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(8) **OTHER BUSINESS**: Lisa Kelly, Founder and Executive Director, WNC From the Ground UP, presented: A request for bridge support:

(a) WNC From the Ground Up was a nonprofit food hub headquartered in Sylva, serving focused on Jackson, Macon and Swain Counties, but also served the westernmost counties of North Carolina in varying capacities. Founded during the pandemic, they connected local farms directly with the families and communities that needed them most.

- 40+ local and regional farms supported
- 300+ households currently served
- 8 counties in the region

(b) When a local food hub closed, farmers lost their market. When farmers lost their market, farmland disappeared. When farmland disappeared in the county, it did not come back. WNC From the Ground Up was not an outside organization. They were born here, in the middle of a pandemic, out of a real need to keep farmers farming. They knew the farms, families and the land. Since 2020, they paid over \$1,000,000 directly to local and regional farmers and connected them to the people who live there. Federal and state funding cycles were not permanent and when that money disappeared, the farmers were left holding the cost of capacity they built to meet the demand. A locally rooted program like Nourished Jackson created the stable, consistent market that kept farmers from being whipsawed by funding cliffs. State and federal dollars then became what they should be: a boost, not a lifeline. This was about keeping farmers farming. It was about keeping food local and affordable for the families in the county who need it most. It was about the county choosing to protect what it already had before it was gone.

(c) Policy and infrastructure work:

- Helped change the County’s Heavy Industry Ordinance in 2022 to allow meat processing.
- Member of the County Agriculture Advisory Board and Farm Bureau’s Women’s Leadership Committee.
- On the steering committee of the Headwaters Conservation Plan.
- Expanded facility from 1,700 SF to 18,000 SF in Sylva to accommodate state and federally funded programs.
- Sponsored Cost of Community Service Study.
- Serve as sponsoring organization for the Farmland Preservation Plan.
- Collaborate with other organizations to change Present Use Value Statute
- Member of BCBS Foundation’s Food is Medicine cohort and WNC Health Policy Initiative.
- \$600,000+ paid directly to local and regional farmers in the first half of 2025
- 1,000+ households served at peak operations in 2025

(d) Current challenge: In 2025, they lost three major funding streams simultaneously. The operating budget unexpectedly dropped from \$1.2M in the first six months of 2025 to \$50K annually. They were maintaining operations and 300 households served, while pursuing over \$750,000 in pending grants and funding streams.

(e) What they were building:

- Nourished Jackson – Food as Medicine
- Farmland Preservation
- Farmer Resource Library
- Retail and Wholesale
- Multimedia Classroom

(f) Funding in the pipeline:

- \$328,000 State Infrastructure Funding – approved and would be reimbursed in July
- \$750,000 Pending grants and funding applications
- Selected for the 2025 ARC Ready Non-profits Program and the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond Rural Investment Collaborative for 2026
- Bridge funding would keep operations until resources arrived.

(g) Requests:

- Three months of bridge support to keep the doors open.
- Electricity
- Software and Tech

(h) Long term revenue and financial stability: When Nourished Jackson became operational, the infrastructure funding that followed would open the door to sustainable, recurring revenue streams. Insurance company reimbursements for food as medicine prescriptions would become a direct and reliable funding source and as the program expanded to cover more chronic conditions and more patients, income would grow. They were developing a long term plan for an annual festival centered on local agriculture. This would generate direct revenue for WNC From the Ground Up and would serve a broader economic purpose for the county. Farmland preservation funds supported local businesses and tourism dollars flowed from the same event. It was the kind of investment that paid back to the county in ways that went well beyond the organization.

General discussions were held.
Informational item.

There being no further business, Commissioner Smith moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Hooper seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board

Mark A. Letson, Chairman