

**MINUTES OF A BOARD RETREAT
OF THE JACKSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
HELD ON
JANUARY 3, 2013**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met a Board Retreat on January 3, 2013, 8:30 am, North Carolina Center for Advancement of Teaching, 276 NCCAT Dr., Room 109, Cullowhee, North Carolina.

Present: W. J. Debnam, Chairman
Doug Cody, Commissioner
Charles Elders, Commissioner
Mark Jones, Commissioner
Vicki Greene, Commissioner

Chuck Wooten, County Manager
Pat Parris, Clerk to Board
J. K. Coward, County Attorney

Chairman Debnam called the retreat to order.

(1) PLANNING GOALS FOR 2013:

(a) Televised Meetings: Mr. Wooten stated this issue has been discussed informally. Live screening may allow more people, anyone who has access to the internet, to be able to watch but an expense would be involved.

(b) Advertising Meetings/Events: Chairman Debnam suggested that Fontana Library be requested to post Commissioners' meeting/event information in the Cashiers and Sylva libraries. The IT Dept. has improved postings on the county website and people need to understand that is the place they need to go to for information. The webcam at the Cashiers Recreation Center was a success and one will be available for the SMHS and Blue Ridge School projects and hopefully the new dental school project. Maintaining and updating the county website is almost a fulltime job.

(c) Electronic Agendas: Discussion concerning sending agenda materials electronically rather than in paper form. Chairman Debnam, Emergency Mgmt. Director Todd Dillard and Finance Director Darlene Fox have been trying out Tablets to see how they work. The cost is approximately \$400 each. Mr. Wooten will put a package together for further discussion.

(d) County Flag: Mr. Wooten reported that the subcommittee selected five drawings for review by the Board. Several drawings were submitted by elementary school students; however, part of the requirements was to use a certain software package so they would be camera ready. Elementary schools did not have access to the software, but several did take the time and effort to submit drawings. He suggested displaying those drawings in a Justice Center hallway and a certificate be sent to those students. During the next couple of months, the Board will be requested to make a selection or, in the alternative, displaying the top five drawings for public comments.

(2) MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION & PROPERTY TAX

COLLECTION: The General Assembly passed a new law to create a combined motor vehicle registration renewal and vehicle tax collection system. Beginning in July 2013, residents will receive a single bill for both vehicle property tax and vehicle renewal. Residents cannot get tags renewed until their vehicle property tax is paid.

(3) 2016 PROPERTY REVALUATION: Bobby McMahan, Tax Assessor, and Kevin Ford, Contract Consultant, gave a power point presentation depicting the many facets involved in the revaluation process. Routing is 50% complete, field review of routed property is 30% complete, data entry of completed field work is 100% complete, review process of completed field work is 40% complete, 2012 sales data analysis of recorded deeds is 100% complete, and filing and organization of all completed work is approximately 100% complete.

Field reviews will be on going for the next 30 months and based on the work flow during 2012, field review could potentially be completed in mid-2015. A statutory “Schedule of Values” will be submitted for Board consideration in November 2015.

The General Assembly has requested the Dept. of Revenue to form a “reappraisal committee” to draft standards that would be applied statewide. In addition, the 8-year reappraisal cycle is too long and should be changed.

(4) SELF INSURANCE 101: Mr. Wooten stated that the county has a self-funded health insurance plan and expends about \$3.6 million per year in medical costs. He introduced Bob Carpenter and Scott Stanberry local agents who serve as consultants to help evaluate the plan, and Steve Harris, Director of Business Development for Crescent Health Solutions, the Third Party Administrator.

Mr. Carpenter stated that since it is a self-funded plan, the county controls the plan design, pays medical and Rx claims, a third party administrator administers the plan, and reinsurance limits risk. The county is not fully self-funded and when claims reach an aggregate limit, reinsurance or an insurance company pays the claims. The consultants provide the county with day-to-day support with communications, analysis of plan performance, research and advice on regulatory issues, vendor performance reviews, review of contract language and terms, and plan options. He meets with county officials on a monthly basis to review the total plan costs including the amount of medical and Rx claims along with fixed costs.

Mr. Harris stated that Crescent as the Third Party Administrator (TPA) collects all medical bills from physicians and hospitals which are then reviewed to make sure they are correct, filled out correctly, and priced correctly. If everything is correct, the TPA then processes claims and issues payment. He gave a power point presentation and explained the different groups involved in the self-funded plan, i.e., reinsurance, accumulation period, lasers, specific deductible, and aggregate stop loss.

(5) CODE ENFORCEMENT: Tony Elders, Director, stated that it is necessary to review fees and compare them to surrounding counties on a regular basis. He presented a fee comparison chart and in most every case, Jackson County fees are the lowest in the region. Plat review fees were not included in the comparison because they vary widely in the region. The current fee schedule includes more than 40 different fees for various types of permits, inspections and plat reviews. Most of the department's costs arise from staff time and travel expenses. Steps have been taken to reduce travel costs such as cross training to allow multiple inspections by a single inspector during a site visit. Fire inspections are performed on a schedule provided by the Office of State Fire Marshal. All schools require two inspections per year at least 180 days apart. Businesses, apartments, hotels, churches, restaurants, nursing homes, and day care centers are all inspected on intervals ranging from one to three years apart. The new software system being developed will improve efficiency.

(6) MEETINGS AND SCHEDULING: After discussion, it was the general consensus to:

- Schedule public hearings prior to regular meetings
- Schedule monthly work sessions – preferably prior to a regular meeting
- Schedule four regular meetings (one per quarter) in various communities
- Schedule only one regular meeting in the months of July and December
- Schedule reports for department heads during work sessions including the Register of Deeds and Sheriff
- Schedule semi-annual joint work sessions with municipalities
- Schedule work session with School Board
- Schedule work session with SCC Board of Trustees
- Schedule an annual report from TWSA Director during a work session
- Schedule another meeting with Chief and Tribal Council

(7) ABC BOARD: The next step for consideration is the establishment of a Jackson County ABC Board. The Board would consist of a 3 or 5 person board and would have authority for the entire County, except for the Town of Sylva, unless the two boards are consolidated. The NC ABC Commission prefers a single consolidated board. The major point of discussion with Town officials centers on the distribution of profits. Under the current Town resolution the net profits are distributed equally between the Town and the County. Revenue from ABC sales is a major revenue source in the Town budget. A resolution to establish a Jackson County ABC Board should address the distribution of profits and the merging of the two boards. Once a board is established then all operations, including the location of stores, is the responsibility of the Jackson County ABC Board. County Commissioners would appoint members of the ABC Board.

Chairman Debnam and Commissioner Jones volunteered to serve on a sub-committee and work with representatives from the Town to develop an agreement for consideration by the two boards. The deadline for adoption of an agreement is the first meeting in March.

(8) GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS RAILWAY: Several meetings have been held with representatives of GSMR and the Town of Dillsboro to discuss the possibility of the railroad returning to Dillsboro for a portion of their departures. Initially the discussion was focused on assisting GSMR with relocating steam engines from Maine to North Carolina. The discussion has now turned toward assisting GSMR with the restoration of existing steam engines and construction of a turntable in Dillsboro. Dillsboro was unsuccessful in identifying funding agencies to assist with the venture. GSMR has suggested a willingness to have some departures from Dillsboro, but certain improvements are needed.

It was recommended that a sub-committee be established to meet with GSMR representatives to determine exactly what would be required to bring the railroad back to Dillsboro and to develop a funding request for consideration by the Commissioners. The agreement should include a commitment from GSMR as to departures from Dillsboro over a reasonable period of time and timeline for beginning the service. Mr. Coward volunteered to serve, at no cost, with Commissioners Cody and Elders. The deadline for a sub-committee report is the second meeting in March.

(9) TIER DESIGNATIONS: Cindy Messer, Western Regional Manager NC Department of Commerce, stated that by statute, the NC Dept. of Commerce calculates tiers for all 100 counties. Tier rankings assign each county a designation of Tier 1 (most distressed), Tier 2 or Tier 3 (least distressed). Specific data is gathered on four factors to determine each county's economic distress rank among the 100 counties:

- Percentage growth in population (2010 census reflects a 21.5% growth since 2000)
- Median household income (2010 estimated median family income - \$49,500, 20.8% growth since 2000)
- Average rate of unemployment (Oct. 2012 rate was 7.9% which is lowest rate among 6 westernmost counties)
- Adjusted property tax base per capita (268,651.27 average tax base per resident)

Tier 1 "automatic qualifier" is a county with a population between 12,000 and 49,999 and a poverty rate of 19% or greater. Jackson County's current poverty rate is 20.4%.

- Estimate in the past 12 months below poverty level – 7,185 residents
- Enrolled in college undergraduate years – 1,647
- Enrolled in college graduate or profession school - 131

Data from WCU students who live off campus was included in the calculation of the county's poverty rate. The inclusion of WCU students in the population count and the calculation of the poverty rate appear to be the primary reason for the high poverty rate and subsequent Tier 1 ranking.

(10) ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Consultants David and Betty Huskins, Ridgetop Assoc., presented a "Comprehensive Economic Development Study" (CEDS). CEDS is a "road map" or foundation for establishing an economic development program. CEDS is a "living document" that should be used and modified as the economic environment shifts and changes. The county should focus first on the "quick wins" that will move the opportunities identified forward using the theory that success breeds success and pulls people together for a common cause.

(a) The **Work Plan** includes four core areas of focus:

- Build on the county's competitive advantages and leverage the marketplace.
- Establish and maintain a robust countywide infrastructure.
- Create revitalized and vibrant communities.
- Foster healthy and innovative people

(b) **Opportunities identified:**

- Pursue becoming a regional health-care hub
- Natural products industry through biodiversity
- Outdoor recreation product expansion
- Partner with GSMR & Swain County for new tourism product development
- Further develop the second-home/retirement industry
- Build a technology-based cluster in partnership with WCU and SCC
- Complete broadband "last mile" to businesses in the county
- Enhance water and sewer infrastructure where possible with TWSA
- Explore WCU student market and their needs and leverage that asset
- Build a strong entrepreneurial environment for business start ups
- Identify potential sites for new business activity – buildings and sites
- Develop a method of leveraging and attracting young retirees that are interested in starting a new business in the county

(c) **Short Term Wins:**

- Solidify formal partnerships with WCU & SCC
 - Leverage their vision plans for the county's benefit
 - Engage them in the technology, healthcare and tourism industry clusters for the county
 - Engage SCC more actively in entrepreneurship efforts
- Solidify partnership with GSMR & Swain County to re-establish operations in Dillsboro
- Complete broadband "last mile" to businesses in the county, working with BalsamWest
- Complete Action Plans for the development and utilization of the Tuckaseegee Mills and Whittier Industrial Park properties
 - Business incubator in collaboration with SCC
 - Regional industrial/business park (possible collaboration with EBCI)
- Engage formally with the Blueways Trail initiative launched by Duke Energy and Smoky Mountain Host (pilot project is underway in Jackson County)
- Solidify formal relationship with EBCI to explore possibilities for leveraging the gaming cluster

(d) **Next Steps:**

- Meet with the towns to dissolve the old Jackson County EDC
- Distribute the existing assets back to the partners
- Establish economic development as a department in county government
- Appoint a Business and Industry Development Advisory Committee

(11) PLANNING DEPT. UPDATES: Gerald Green, Planning Director, presented the following:

(a) Ordinance updates and revisions:

- Subdivision Ordinance - proposed changes include open space revisions, water recharge standards and identify possible process improvements to coordinate with revisions to the Mountain & Hillside Dev. Ordinance. Submit proposed revisions to Commissioners in September 2013.
- Mountain & Hillside Dev. Ordinance – review currently underway; standards to be coordinated with the Subdivision Ordinance and building code standards. Submit proposed revisions to Commissioners in July 2013.
- US 441 Corridor Dev. Ordinance – community meetings will be held to present proposed revisions. Submit proposed revisions to Commissioners in May 2013.
- Cashiers Commercial Area Dev. Ordinance – review to assure it still is compatible with the goals and vision of the community. Submit proposed revisions to Commissioners in the spring of 2014.

(b) Studies - Cullowhee Community planning effort, Cashiers Community visioning effort, WCU Campus master plan, and Hwy. 107 Scenic highway study.

(c) Greenways – serve as staff to Greenway Committee in developing countywide greenway system, manage CWMTF and PARTF grants, implementation of Phase I of the Tuckasegee River Greenway, and manage grant for the South Painter Park.

(d) Community Dev. Program - continue working with Mountain Projects to complete the \$450,000 grant.

(e) Economic Dev. Projects include developing the certified entrepreneurial communities program, develop and maintain data bases related to economic development, provide information and data to current and prospective businesses, and work with economic developers from other counties in region to develop regional initiative.

(f) Cullowhee Community Planning – request endorsement by the Commissioners provided that it is led by and has the support of the community, and establish a steering committee that will be charged with defining the planning area and drafting the standards to guide development.

Mr. Green requested that the Commissioners identify their top priority projects.

(12) CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS: Mr. Wooten presented the following:

Short Term	
Renovate old maintenance building to house Transit Dept.	\$125,000
Relocate Board of Elections to space currently occupied by Transit Dept	\$ 35,000
Renovate SCC house in Cashiers for senior programs	\$ 75,000
Renovate SCC garage in Cashiers for Sheriff’s satellite office	\$ 75,000
Engage designer to develop program and cost estimate for new 911 call center	\$ 50,000
Engage designer to study Justice Center for creating a 3 rd courtroom	\$ 50,000
Evaluate Justice Center security and access systems	\$ 25,000
Greenway Phase 1	\$400,000

Long Term	
Construct new or renovate existing building for Health Dept.	
Improvements to animal shelter	
Renovate permit office in Cashiers	
Construct pottery facility at Green Energy Park	
Relocate Agriculture Extension and Soil and Water Depts.	
Enhance recreation opportunities	
Continue expansion of greenway	

Schools – engage designer to evaluate existing buildings and prioritize renovations	\$ 50,000
---	-----------

Volunteer Fire Departments	
Canada Fire Dept. – expansion of existing building	
Cullowhee Fire Dept. – replace main building (transfer property)	
Savannah Fire Dept. – substation for Greens Creek Community	

Funding Sources as of December 31, 2012	
Capital Reserve Fund (General Fund)	\$ 845,882
Conservation, Preservation, Recreation (CPR)	\$ 757,213
Emergency Management Center	\$ 586,553
Recreation Capital Projects	\$1,200,000

Fund Balance Policy	
Total General Fund Balance, June 30,2012	\$21,342,899
Less: Restricted, Committed & Assigned	<u>\$ 5,930,322</u>
Unassigned General Fund Balance – June 30,2012	\$15,412,577
FY12-13 General Fund Budget	\$52,227,229
25% of FY12-13 General Budget	\$13,056,807
Funds Available for Appropriation	\$ 2,355,770

There being no further comments, Commissioner Cody moved that the Retreat be adjourned. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the Retreat adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Attested By:

Patsy C. Parris, Clerk to Board

Approved:

W. J. Debnam, Chairman