

Unsealed by Board of Commissioners 01/13/2020.

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
September 24, 2018 – CLOSED SESSION

Closed Session #1

Pursuant to NC General Statute 143-318.11 (a) (5) § to establish, or to instruct the public body's staff or negotiating agents concerning the position to be taken by or on behalf of the public body in negotiating the price and other material terms of a contract or proposed contract for the acquisition of real property by purchase, option, exchange, or lease, closed session was entered into at 8:52 p.m. Present were Chairman Chapman, Commissioners Chappell, Hawkins, Lemel and Phillips, County Manager Jaime Laughter, Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Josh Hallingse, Transylvania Economic Alliance Board of Directors Chairman Jeremy Owen, Parks and Recreation Director Jared Mull, participating via conference call County Attorney Misti Bass, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Josh Hallingse provided the Board of Commissioners with an update on the negotiation efforts on the potential acquisition of the old airport property for sale by Brevard College. He recapped information presented to the Board at previous closed sessions and how it led to the due diligence on potentially converting the currently owned Parks and Recreation property located off Ecusta Road to a business/industrial park and repurposing the old airport property into parks and recreational use. The purpose of this closed session was to seek direction from the Board on next steps.

The property consists of 55 acres. Because a portion of the property lies in the floodplain, certain contingency provisions would be required if the County decided to build on it.

The Alliance negotiated for purchase in order to tie up the property to complete the due diligence phase. During this phase, the Alliance worked with a consultant to develop a conceptual plan for the purpose of determining if the property could be used for parks and recreation, construction costs, types of amenities that could be accommodated, the value of the streambank restoration credits, and how to recoup county dollars if it was determined the property was not developable for parks and recreation purposes.

Brevard College accepted a purchase price of \$440,000 for the due diligence period. The property appraised at \$460,000 which is below tax value. The Alliance is under contract with Brevard College until October 11.

Mr. Hallingse showed Commissioners drawings of the conceptual plan completed by the consultant. The consultant attempted to create a realistic plan by replicating the current amenities and facilities from the current location and adding amenities that were included in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. It included tennis and basketball courts, picnic shelters, playgrounds, a river viewing area, ballfields and multipurpose fields, and a stream and wetland mitigation area consisting of 8.75 acres which could net back \$150,000 in credits thereby offsetting the purchase price. In addition, the plan created an area for a future parking lot and potential access to the property from Greenville Highway.

Mr. Hallingse sought direction from the Board on communication to Brevard College. He shared that the Board of Directors of the Transylvania Economic Alliance, the Boys and Girls Club of Transylvania County and other community partners are excited about the potential of this project.

Commissioners discussed at length the property characteristics in an effort to determine if they wanted to continue negotiations and get to a point of purchasing the property.

Commissioner Phillips was very concerned about the frequency of flooding and the cost of maintaining the property as a result. Mr. Hallingse pointed out the consultant developed two concepts for Commissioners' consideration. The first is an active recreation concept with more concentration on fields. The second is a passive recreation concept that would be less costly to maintain. He also noted that the conceptual plan he presented included the cost of each amenity, but asked Commissioners to keep in mind the total cost is an estimate made by professionals and the conceptual plan contains several more amenities than the current location. Furthermore, other counties have built parks and recreation facilities and amenities on fill material in order to mitigate floodplain. He reported that he worked with a hydro-engineer during this process to ensure the plan would conform to the City of Brevard's Unified Development Ordinance.

Chairman Chapman expressed concern that the concept might not come to fruition if the City of Brevard is unwilling to relocate its ballfields. If that is the case, he wondered if the County would be able to determine other uses for the property, like workforce housing.

Commissioner Phillips was bothered that access to the property was limited and not as easy to find, in his opinion, as the current parks and recreation facilities. He also felt the accessibility issues would create additional traffic problems.

Mr. Hallingse stressed that the Alliance is not an expert in parks and recreation. Their focus is on finding supply for job creation and they felt this was the best opportunity they have to present at this time. The existing parks and recreation property consists of 50 acres of developable property that is ideal for job creation resulting in tax revenue for the County. The Alliance felt that the property would be better utilized as industrial space. Mr. Hallingse informed Commissioners that the current parks and recreation property consists of 30 acres and could accommodate three to four industrial sites. It is adjacent to Jennings Industrial Park and has the potential to be converted into a site for three buildings: one at 70,000 sq. ft. and two at 20,000 sq. ft.

Chairman Chapman stated that the accepted offer on the table being below tax value, plus the ability to reduce the cost with the streambank credits, having access to utilities, and knowing that the property can be developed at a lower cost (passive recreation-low cost soccer fields, for example), make the acquisition more valuable to him. Commissioner Lemel agreed, and noted that purchasing the property allows us some flexibility because we are not in a position to develop it immediately.

Commissioner Hawkins inquired about ongoing maintenance costs and whether or not they would be comparable to current costs. Parks and Recreation Director Jared Mull responded that maintenance costs would be higher because a park this size would need one to two full time staff to maintain. He said current staffing levels could not maintain it and that dedicated staffing would be required to keep the park clean, to mow, etc.

Commissioner Hawkins inquired if the conceptual plan replaces ballfields and soccer fields or adds to the current number of fields. Mr. Mull reported that the conceptual drawing adds fields and would provide for the number of fields that the Transylvania Youth Soccer Association feels is adequate. Mr. Hallingse noted that fields are expensive to construct and maintain. The County would not have to build all of the fields in the plan. The conceptual plan simply includes everything at the current location, plus items in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, in order to understand costs.

Mr. Hallingse reminded Commissioners that the due diligence period expires soon. He asked for direction from Commissioners. He suggested Commissioners hold a public hearing and vote on whether

or not to purchase the property or renegotiate with Brevard College. With that said, he did not feel Brevard College would be open to renegotiating because there were other interested buyers.

Commissioner Hawkins felt strongly that a presentation to the public include an exit strategy. If it is determined such a project is not doable, then the County and Alliance can walk away with confidence that they did their best to make it work. Commissioners were reminded about the streambank restoration credits and how they would increase the buy-down. Additionally, Commissioners could change the configuration, layout, or use and it could become a revenue stream for the County.

Commissioner Hawkins pointed out should the County decide to purchase the property it must be done so for parks and recreation purposes; otherwise, it does not help the Alliance achieve its goal. With that said, the Commissioners need to be comfortable with the purchase price because of the property being prone to flooding.

It was the consensus of the Commissioners to present a proposal to the public whereby the County would acquire land for the purposes of upgrading parks and recreation and providing much needed inventory for economic development, with an exit strategy if it is determined the project is not doable. For the record, Commissioners Chappell and Phillips wanted it to be known they were not in favor of moving forward.

Commissioners suggested a possible timeline of presenting at the October 9 Board of Commissioners' meeting, a public hearing at the October 22 Board of Commissioners' meeting, with a decision coming at the first meeting in November, following a request for an extension of the due diligence period. The Manager stressed the importance of engaging and informing the public about this project, noting there may still be some strong criticism despite the effort.

There was brief discussion on financing, including PARTF grants, 10-year debt service, and other grant funds.

Mike Hawkins, Chair
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board