

MINUTES
TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JANUARY 22, 2024 – REGULAR MEETING

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in a regular meeting on Monday, January 22, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in the Multipurpose Chambers at the County Administration Building, located at 101 S. Broad Street, Brevard, NC.

Commissioners present were Emmett Casciato, Larry Chapman, Chairman Jason Chappell, Vice-Chairman Jake Dalton, and Teresa McCall. Also present were County Manager Jaime Laughter and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan. County Attorney John Kubis participated via Zoom meeting software.

Media: Dan DeWitt – *Brevard Newsbeat*
Jon Rich – *The Transylvania Times*

There were approximately 60 people in the audience.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Jason Chappell presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

WELCOME

Chairman Chappell welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Commissioners and staff in attendance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jay Farrell: Mr. Farrell is the President of the Board of Directors for the Haven of Transylvania County. He thanked the Commissioners for the funding the County provides to The Haven to support transitional housing for persons experiencing homelessness. He shared that over the past weekend due to the extreme cold weather, The Haven operated a warming shelter for other homeless people at a local church. Mr. Farrell asked the County to consider coordinating with The Haven should there be such an emergency in the future and The Haven is unable to line up a church or other organization to help. He stressed that The Haven is not asking for money; rather they would like to coordinate with the County and plan for future needs beyond what The Haven can do. Mr. Farrell pointed out that when natural disasters have occurred, the County has helped those who were most affected. The Haven would like the Board of Commissioners to consider extremely cold weather as an emergency. Mr. Farrell pointed out that with persons experiencing homelessness, the effects are not as obvious as property damage or displacement of people but the effects like frostbite, even death, are just as serious.

Alice Wellborn: Ms. Wellborn referred to a recent newspaper article entitled, “Local Officials Share Hopes for the New Year.” She shared that the Mayor of Brevard shared specific goals around affordable and workforce housing, improving downtown, road improvements, increasing bike and pedestrian accessibility, and building new infrastructure. The Mayor of Rosman also shared specific goals to add to local infrastructure, including a water treatment facility, affordable housing, and a park master plan. The Sheriff's Office has a specific goal to control the crime rates specifically around drugs. Ms. Wellborn stated that the County Commission's goals were vague and unspecified. They were reported in the article as addressing items that will have an impact on Transylvania County for many years to come, announcements and investments that will impact our community in positive ways, providing more resources and opportunities for

our citizens and helping chart our future, and a vibrant future. She interpreted the County Commission's statements as communicating no goals, no accomplishments, and no plans, and she felt it was time for a change.

AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

Commissioner Chapman requested to add under New Business Item E Commissioners' Support for the NCACC Film "The Veteran's Battlefield" and move the Manager's Report to Item F. The Manager requested to add a closed session per N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 (a) (4) To discuss the location or expansion of businesses or other industries in the area served by the public body.

Commissioner McCall moved to approve the revised agenda, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Chapman moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner Dalton, and unanimously approved.

The following items were approved:

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Board of Commissioners met in a regular meeting on January 8, 2024. The Board approved the January 8, 2024, minutes as submitted.

DECEMBER 2023 DISCOVERY, RELEASE, AND MONTHLY SETTLEMENT

Per N.C.G.S. § 105-312 (b), the Tax Administrator must see that all property not properly listed during the regular listing period be listed, assessed, and taxed. The Tax Administrator shall file such reports of discoveries with the Board of Commissioners. Per N.C.G.S. § 105-381 (b), the Tax Administrator must provide a monthly report to the Board of Commissioners of the actions taken by the Tax Administrator on requests for release or refund, which shall be recorded in the minutes. For December 2023, tax dollars released totaled \$3,937.72 and refunds issued amounted to \$1,491.37. The Board approved the December 2023 Discovery, Release, and Monthly Settlement as presented.

VAYA HEALTH QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

Per N.C.G.S. § 122C-117 (c), the quarterly fiscal monitoring reports for the local management entities must be presented to the Board of Commissioners. This report covers the financial statistics for the first quarter of FY 2024. Vaya Health reported its current actual revenues as \$205,354,793 (75.58% of the annualized budget) and current actual expenditures as \$211,737,485 (77.93% of the annualized budget). This equates to a current net loss from operations of \$8,879,291. The agency reported the following fund balances: (1) \$102,948,225 restricted for risk reserve; (2) \$50,648,927 restricted for statute, prepaids, and investments in fixed assets; and (3) \$741,880 unrestricted. Vaya Health also reported a total operating cash of \$128,932,408 net of risk reserves. The total spendable cash estimate is \$51,417,414. The Board received the report as submitted and as required by statute.

OUT-OF-STATE TRAVEL REQUEST - SHERIFF'S OFFICE

The Transylvania County Sheriff's Office Special Response Team requested approval for two officers to travel out of state for Night Vision Training at the Clinton House Plantation in Clinton, South Carolina on February 17-18, 2024, and for one officer to travel out of state for Basic SWAT Training at the Charleston Police Department in Charleston, South Carolina on February 12-16, 2024. This training is required for staff to qualify to serve on the Special Response Team during high-risk law enforcement operations. The

Sheriff's Office included funds in its FY 2024 budget for this purpose. The Board approved the out-of-state travel requests as presented.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUEST - REGION 1 PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The ARPA Regional Workforce Development Director requested approval to attend the 2024 National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Empowering Public Health Law Practitioners Convening alongside the Regional Public Health Legal Consultant from the firm Teague Campbell in New Orleans, Louisiana on April 30- May 2, 2024. The ARPA grant outcome requirements advocate for the need for national-level public health legal training. The Public Health Law Practitioners convening will help the Regional Public Health Workforce Director, legal counsel, and Region 1 Health Directors leverage timely and relevant public health law and policy concepts and information that will help provide technical assistance to Health Departments in Region 1. The conference theme ensures that the event will provide an opportunity to reflect on how law can be used to positively impact the region's health and well-being. All travel and training have been approved in the grant program's action plan and budgeted by the NC Division of Public Health. The Board approved the out-of-state travel request for regional staff and Region 1 Health Directors to engage in professional development as submitted.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUEST - LIBRARY

Library Director Rishara Finsel requested approval for out-of-state travel for her and three staff to attend the Public Library Association (PLA) Conference in Columbus, Ohio from April 3-5, 2024. PLA is the premier conference for public libraries, featuring more than 100 professional development programs on a wide range of topics and designed to facilitate innovation, idea sharing, and collaboration. Additionally, most notable library vendors provide exhibits and product demonstrations, allowing for hands-on experience with new and developing library products and technologies. This quality professional development will provide education and inspiration for library staff and will improve the day-to-day programs and operations of the library, resulting in increased efficiency and improved service. The Board approved the request for out-of-state travel as submitted.

LETTER IN SUPPORT OF ADVENTHEALTH HENDERSONVILLE'S CERTIFICATE OF NEED APPLICATION FOR NEONATAL ACUTE BEDS

Currently, there is limited access to neonatal care services in Western North Carolina which poses a significant challenge for our region. Infants and newborns needing nursing care must compete for access at Mission Hospital's tertiary care center. When Mission's neonatal beds are full, patients and their families must travel outside the region or state for care. The development of neonatal acute care beds at AdventHealth Hendersonville will offer a crucial community-based alternative, alleviating the burden placed on families and providing a more accessible option for those in need. AdventHealth Hendersonville is applying for a Certificate of Need to develop neonatal acute care beds in Henderson County and is seeking a letter of support from the region's leaders to help bring these vital services to Henderson County to support infants and newborns in need of specialized care. The Board approved a letter in support of AdventHealth Hendersonville's Certificate of Need Application for neonatal acute beds. At the request of Commissioner Chapman, the Board agreed to modify the letter showing it coming from the full Board instead of the Chairman only.

PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS

RECOGNITION OF CITIZEN ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

In July 2015, the Board of Commissioners implemented a recognition program to express their appreciation to citizens who volunteer their time and expertise on the County's citizen advisory councils. The Board intends to recognize citizens on a semi-annual basis. This period covered July 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023. The Board presented each person in attendance with a certificate of appreciation and an insulated

mug with the County logo. The Clerk extended the invitation to either the December 11, January 8, or January 22 meeting. The Clerk will mail certificates to those who are unable to attend.

- Kate Hayes – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (attended 1/8/2024 meeting)
- Joel Malefyt – Transylvania Natural Resources Council (unable to attend)
- Fred Morse – Transylvania County Planning Board (attended 12/11/2023 meeting)
- Ali Holroyd Lien – Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority (unable to attend)
- Layton Parker – Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority (attended 12/11/2023 meeting)
- Jeremy Gibbs – Library Board of Trustees (unable to attend)

Chairman Chappell encouraged citizens to consider applying to serve on a citizen advisory council. Citizens can access an application via the County’s website or by contacting the Clerk to the Board.

VETERANS HISTORY MUSEUM OF THE CAROLINAS - WALK THROUGH HISTORY EVENT PRESENTATION

The Veterans History Museum of the Carolinas hosted an event entitled "Walk Through History" in November. Museum representatives gave a presentation to the Board of Commissioners on the success of the event. This is a summary of their presentation:

Mike McCarthy began by thanking the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority for giving the Museum a grant that served as the seed funding for the event. The Museum also charged a fee of \$125 for attendees. Mr. McCarthy pointed out that 61 people from out of the county paid the fee and attended the event, which proves they are a draw for history. Next, Mr. McCarthy shared several photos from the event that included WWII veterans, local officials, nationally known speakers and historians, displays, etc. Attendees were able to meet many WWII veterans and hear stories about their experiences. Later, the attendees took a tour of the Museum. Mr. McCarthy shared that the event was highlighted through the creation of a webpage, which also included information about accommodations and things to do in Transylvania County. Mr. McCarthy shared that the Museum’s website has received national attention, and the Museum has been successful at receiving lots of local coverage in various media. He then turned the presentation over to John Luzena.

Mr. Luzena has been a patron of the Museum from the beginning and has watched it grow into what it is today. He stated that the “Walk Through History” event was very special. It was a two-day conference with renowned authors. The integration of the historians and authors with the local veterans was especially wonderful and unique. The event operated smoothly and was something everyone should be proud of. Mr. Luzena shared that the Museum hosts several events with speakers throughout the year and they attract a great crowd. The Museum is beginning to be noticed both regionally and nationally and has served as a place where veterans can share their stories and experiences with others. The Museum is more than stuff; it is people and veterans that make it a living place.

Next, David Morrow, the Museum’s president, shared some statistics. He reported that 3,800 people have visited the Museum over the last year. The “Walk Through History” event included 26 volunteers who put in over 400 hours. The event attracted 61 people from outside the county and after the event, their comments about the event and visit to Transylvania County were positive. Mr. Morrow stated the Museum looks forward to having another successful year. He thanked the Board of Commissioners and the Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority for their support.

To wrap up the presentation, Mr. McCarthy stated this event illustrates how the Museum has become a historical center of excellence and that people will come here to hear and learn about it. He submitted to

the Board that when the time comes, the Museum deserves space in the County Courthouse so that they can remain downtown and attract visitors as they currently do today.

As the founder of the Veterans History Museum, Commissioner Casciato thanked all the volunteers and board members who planned the event. He felt strongly that the Museum should continue to exist and grow in Transylvania County.

BLUE RIDGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STRATEGIC CAPITAL PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Manager presented the findings from the final report of the Blue Ridge Community College Strategic Capital Planning Committee. The Board received a full report in its agenda packet and staff will make it available on the County website. The report not only summarizes the findings but also walks through all the steps the committee took and includes all the resource handouts the committee members received and the minutes from each meeting.

Background

The Board of Commissioners approved a master plan study for Blue Ridge Community College in FY 2021. The College hired the firm Clark Nexsen to conduct the study who later presented the report to the Commissioners. The Commissioners then appointed an advisory committee that met from April through October of 2023. This is the final report from their work. The committee was composed of the following members: Dr. Abraham Pallas, who served as chair, Chip Brown, Commissioner Emmett Casciato, Superintendent Dr. Jeff McDaris, and following his retirement Superintendent Dr. Lisa Fletcher, Chip Gould, Doug Harris, and Burton Hodges. The Manager served as the staff to the committee. She recognized Budget and Management Analyst Jennifer Wright for her assistance in compiling the information for the final report. Blue Ridge Community College also had staff representation from Dr. Laura Leatherwood, Glenda McCarson, and Chad Merrill.

Background Information Presented

- Transylvania County Campus Facilities Condition Assessment Plan 2021-2026
 - Straus Building was given 130 points out of 200 possible points which is a B Rating for Remodel with energy efficiency being the biggest point loss. It identified \$421,315 in improvements through FY 2026.
 - Applied Technology Building received 153 points out of a possible 200 points which is an A Rating for Remodel with energy efficiency being the biggest point loss. It identified \$148,220 in improvements through FY 2026.
 - Parking and Landscaping were valued at \$137,560 in needs in capital projects through FY 2026
 - Total improvements identified in the Assessment through FY 2026 was \$707,095
- 2021 Clark Nexsen Master Plan Study
 - This resulted in three options that were presented for the existing site that involved:
 - Demolition of the Straus Building
 - Constructing a new building based on the existing square footage of the Applied Technology Building and Straus Building combined; gross square footage of 40,668 sq. ft.
 - New building containing 54,577 sq. ft. onsite for \$35 million
 - The study was presented to the Board of Commissioners in 2022; the study was also presented to the committee

Enrollment Trends

- The committee wanted to know about the College's enrollment trends, so College staff presented the committee with this information

- Enrollment has grown steadily since FY 2022 but is still just above the minimum 300 FTE threshold required to maintain its campus status which is tied to the funding it receives from the State to operate
- Growth in high school dual enrollment; over 150 students in FY 2023
- About 20% of Transylvania County Schools graduates enter Blue Ridge Community College after graduation

New Program Needs

- The committee wanted to know the types of new programs that would be needed at the Transylvania Campus and the associated square footage
 - New programs added approximately 15,000 sq. ft. of space
 - Below is a list of programs and the associated square footage

Program Needs

Campus Space Required for Successful Implementation (sq. ft.):	
Straus Building (Net/Existing)	20,024
Applied Tech Building (Net/Existing)	10,131
Respiratory Therapy	1300
Welding Lab and Classroom	2500
Large Meeting Room for 100 People	2000
Storage	500
Office Space (Five offices at 120 sq. ft. each).	600
Skilled Trades Lab - Electrical, HVAC, Plumbing	2500
Skilled Trades Lab - Masonry (Exterior, adjacent to multipurpose classrooms)	300
Mechatronics / Life Sciences Lab Flex Spaces	2500
Flex Lab.	2500
Conference Rooms (2 rooms at 180 sq. ft. each)	360
Total Net (sq. ft.) - Usable for Programming Needs	45,215
Grossing factor for Mechanical, Structure, Columns, Circulation.	32,741
Total Gross (sq. ft.)	77,956



Existing Site Challenges Discussed with BRCC Staff

- Maintaining minimum enrollment and new programming needs, including industrial flex space, inability to house site trades in 2022 due to an allocation of equipment from the State
- The right-of-way for the new roundabout on US 64 will come close to abutting the Straus Building
- Some options for the existing site would require relocation or would limit parking during construction
- The committee raised concerns about the City of Brevard’s UDO requirements to expand and maximize the existing site but elected not to explore in detail
- BRCC has explored adjacent parcels in the past, but no willing seller at this time

New Campus Analysis

- The college’s preference is to site a new campus on the east side of the County (toward Pisgah Forest or Penrose)
 - Parcel analysis of 15 buildable acres/25 parcel acres (architect recommendation) on infrastructure was limited by floodplain and other property-specific challenges

- New corridor analysis along US 64 West within 1,000 feet of infrastructure
 - 13 parcels > 20 acres
 - 18 parcels > 15 acres
 - 26 parcels > 10 acres
 - 51 parcels > 5r acres
- Total campus replacement with new programming requires almost 80,000 sq. ft. for \$50.8 million, excluding land purchase, site development, and infrastructure

Funding Planning Data

- The County is limited to property tax and sales tax as its main revenue sources. A ¼ cent sales tax option is not currently being used as a revenue source in Transylvania County and it must be passed by a voter referendum to levy. The main revenue that backs the County's lending is property tax.
- Options for financing:
 - Cash/pay-as-you-go requires saving ahead of a project
 - Issue bonds up to 20 years: General Obligation (requires referendum) or Limited Obligation (requires more cash upfront but no referendum)*
 - Private lending through banks provides up to a 20-year loan in smaller increments, typically nothing above \$10 million to \$15 million*
 - State funding allocation or grants; BRCC has advocated State representatives for funding
 - Sale of property for cash to help offset costs (estimating current campus tax value at \$5 million)
- Estimate ¼ cent sales tax proceeds to generate \$1.5 million annually (2.5 cent property tax equivalent)
 - Would cover payment of \$15 million project at current rates for 20 years
- Every 1 cent of property tax generates an estimated \$600,000
 - Estimate 3.3 additional cents for a project budget of \$35 million with sales tax; and 5.7 cents without sales tax
 - Estimate 1.7 cents pays for \$10 million debt for a \$50 million project; 5.6 with sales tax or 8.1 cents property taxes

*Requires Local Government Commission approval and adds to the process for reaching final approval.

Committee Findings

- There is a need for an additional 15,000 sq. ft. to house the new programs identified for the Transylvania County campus.
- There was a lost opportunity to locate a trade program in Transylvania County due to the lack of space available to house it. There is a potential to lose future opportunities due to this issue.
- It is the committee's consensus that the existing site is not going to meet future flexible needs and is cost-prohibitive to pursue.
- There is urgency to begin planning for a new campus for the community college and pursue land purchase in consultation with the Transylvania Economic Alliance so that a new location complements the needs of economic development and does not detract from them.

This concluded the formal presentation. The Manager took questions and comments from the Commissioners which are detailed below.

Commissioner Chapman encouraged the citizens to review the report which includes the minutes of each committee meeting. He said the timing is critical because the life expectancy is probably 10-15 years. He hoped the citizens grasped the potential cost of each option. He emphasized that the College's requests are in addition to the County's other critical capital needs. He urged the citizens to express to the

Commissioners their priorities. Commissioner Chapman hoped the State would allocate monies to help offset the costs, but our representatives indicated there will be no allocations for counties in the upcoming short session. Commissioner Chapman felt the community college should be a priority, but he was concerned about the costs.

Commissioner Casciato served as the County Commissioner representative on the committee. He pointed out that not all high school graduates are meant to attend a four-year university and instead choose a trade because those services – plumbing, electricity, carpentry, nursing, etc. – are essential to all citizens. The community college can provide the classroom work and training for these trades as long as the County can provide the space. He felt it was important for the community college to expand in Transylvania County to ensure a trained and skilled workforce for the future.

Commissioner McCall asked if the committee looked at the campus' deficiencies to identify what could be done at the existing campus, such as adding space and addressing issues that might impede learning. The Manager reported that the committee primarily focused on a new campus. The firm Clark Nexsen assessed the existing facilities, and they concluded that the Strauss Building is obsolete and should be demolished. That was part of the basis of the committee moving into the next phase of review. Blue Ridge Community College provided an assessment report that identified some deficiencies and a capital program through 2026, but there were no further assessments of the facilities conducted by the committee.

Commissioner McCall said the meeting notes reveal a couple of the committee members voiced the need to look at the existing campus to determine what could be done there in addition to exploring a new campus. However, the focus remained on a new campus. She asked the basis for which Clark Nexsen used to determine that the Strauss Building needed to be demolished and whether a structural engineer had determined the building to be unsafe. The Manager responded no, the recommendation to demolish the building was based on the assessment by the architect. The committee asked whether there was a structural report available and there was not.

Commissioner McCall expressed concern that having a new campus in the eastern part of the County is nearer to Henderson County which is where the main campus is located rather than the geographical center of Transylvania County. With the growth in Fletcher and Mills River, she wondered if the College had plans to establish a satellite campus in that area. The Manager responded she was unaware of any other planned expansions, but there have been discussions with the College about the site needs for the main campus in Henderson County.

Commissioner McCall was concerned that the committee did not take a closer look at the existing campus to identify deficiencies and consider adding square footage to extend the life of the campus. The Board of Commissioners has established priorities which are the courthouse and public schools. As much as she would like to address all the needs, she did not think the citizens could withstand an 8-cent tax increase. Commissioner McCall pointed out that if an attractive piece of land became available to build on, she may consider the possibility of purchasing it; however, she was not convinced that a new campus was the right move.

Commissioner Casciato shared that he asked during a committee meeting about the possibility of adding a second floor to the Strauss Building instead of demolishing it or perhaps modernizing the building, but College representatives said it was not doable. Another obstacle is that the proposed roundabout will be located very close to the Strauss Building on the current campus. Commissioner Casciato also recalled that most of the committee members preferred the location for a new campus in the western part of the County because there is infrastructure and more availability of land. He stressed that the College is very valuable to Transylvania County.

Commissioner Dalton stated that economic development is very important to him. The County has been very successful over the last few years in announcing expansion and recruitment. Blue Ridge Community College is vital to workforce development and recruiting. He pointed out that funding sources laid out in the report are the traditional ones, like property taxes and bonds. He asked if the College has discussed any fundraising efforts to help provide matching funds for grants. The Manager stated that the committee briefly discussed opportunities for grants, primarily through an allocation from the State. She stated that K-12 schools have access to competitive grant funds through the lottery, but it does not apply to community colleges.

Commissioner Chapman asked how the estimated costs were generated. He felt that the Board needed more refined figures before making any decisions. Commissioner Chapman also asked if the Board had a timeline for making a decision. The Manager informed the commissioners that the architect prepared the estimated costs for the master plan study. The estimated costs are for construction only, not site selection. She said the next steps are up to the Board. The presentation of the final report concludes the original charter to the committee, but the Board may charge them with additional work if needed. The Board may also charge staff with conducting additional assessments. The Manager reminded the Board that the County is entering the budget season so there will be a lot of discussion on capital planning. Staff plans to ask the Board to select an architect for the courthouse design at an upcoming meeting, and the Board will receive the findings from the education capital workgroup soon as well. It will be the desire of the Board on how to proceed and determine the funding mechanisms. The Manager noted that Transylvania County is limited in its availability of large parcels which will impact being able to site large projects.

Commissioner Chapman asked where the funding would come from to do the additional work to determine if adding a second story to the Strauss Building was feasible. The Manager stated that the Commissioners could use the fund balance. For comparison, the County engaged the firm Axias to assess the K-12 schools for under \$100,000. The County could engage the firm to perform an assessment.

Commissioner Casciato reiterated that the committee desired a new campus for Blue Ridge Community College in the western part of the County. The Manager pointed out that the findings she showed during the presentation were adopted by the committee. She stated there was discussion on the parcel analysis, but the committee recommended the Board of Commissioners look countywide at the availability of land due to the limited nature of the assessment.

Commissioner Casciato asked if expansion on the existing campus would provide the space to accommodate the trades that are necessary for the workforce. He expressed that he wholeheartedly supported the College because it is so important for the community. The Manager responded that there was no discussion about just leaving the Strauss Building so she could not speak to that at this time. The new programs have assigned square footage of approximately 15,000 additional sq. ft. than what exists on the current campus.

Commissioner Casciato recalled the committee also discussing the possibility of using other existing buildings. The Manager stated the committee discussed it briefly but did not pursue it further. Commissioner McCall noted that many counties have satellite campuses for community college courses. She felt strongly that the Board should consider all options. She pointed out that the Board recently approved a letter to our legislators listing the County's capital needs and requesting funds.

Chairman Chappell thanked the members of the committee for their work. He stressed that the County values its partnership with Blue Ridge Community College, which is one of the reasons the Commissioners established this committee. He commented that the presentation of the report is step

one in what will be a multi-year process. He stressed that Transylvania County has many needs to consider, and the Commissioners are exploring nontraditional revenue sources because the County's tax base is very different from our neighboring counties. Chairman Chappell stated that the final report was very thorough and detailed and provided the Commissioners with a lot of data to consider.

Commissioner Dalton asked about the status of the College's full-time equivalents. The Manager reported that the College presented information on their history and enrollment. The report showed a sharp decline in enrollment during the pandemic, but there has been steady growth since then. The FTE is hovering around 300 which is the threshold for maintaining campus status and receiving the funding for such.

There was no further discussion.

APPOINTMENTS

TRANSYLVANIA NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

There are two vacancies on the Transylvania Natural Resources Council after two individuals rolled off the committee at the end of their terms in September. The Clerk to the Board advertised for the vacancies with an application deadline of December 1, 2023. Applications are kept on file for two years. The Clerk to the Board included in the Board's agenda packet the applications she had on file in addition to the new ones she received as a result of the advertisement. The Transylvania Natural Resources Council met on January 12, reviewed the applications, and provided an analysis of each applicant for the Board's consideration.

Commissioner Dalton nominated and moved to appoint Dan Hodges and Michael Fulton, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.

BOARD OF EQUALIZATION AND REVIEW

Fred Markert's term on the Board of Equalization and Review expires on January 31, 2024. He is eligible and willing to serve another term. There are no term limits. There are no other applications on file. Applicants must own property in Transylvania County.

Commissioner Dalton moved to reappoint Fred Markert to another term on the Board of Equalization and Review, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.

PLANNING BOARD

Greg Cochran's term on the County's Planning Board expires on January 31, 2024. He is eligible and willing to serve another term. There is also a vacancy on the Planning Board due to the resignation of Fred Morse. The Clerk to the Board advertised the vacancy with an application deadline of January 1, 2024. Applications are kept on file for two years. The Clerk to the Board included in the Board's agenda packet the applications she had on file in addition to the new ones she received as a result of the advertisement.

Commissioner Casciato moved to reappoint Greg Cochran to another term on the Planning Board, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously approved.

Commissioner Dalton nominated and moved to appoint Bramley Fisher, seconded by Commissioner Chapman. There were no other nominations. The motion was unanimously approved.

Chairman Chappell called for a brief recess at 7:17 p.m. The Board reconvened at 7:28 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

SELECT VENDOR FOR COUNTYWIDE HOUSING STUDY

The Manager reported that Dogwood Health Foundation awarded Transylvania County a housing grant that focuses on infrastructure as a foundational requirement to meet affordable and workforce housing needs in high-demand communities like Transylvania County. Infrastructure availability and capacity are critical components for builders to reach densities that allow for the cost per unit to meet affordable and/or workforce levels under federal guidelines. The grant included funding for studies that will help to plan for future infrastructure investments with quality pre-engineering costs and a countywide housing study.

County staff met with community stakeholders to gather information on what a housing study would need to include to provide a path forward, including the City of Brevard, Town of Rosman, Sharing House, Habitat for Humanity, Housing Assistance Corporation, Givens Estates, and other leaders interested in addressing the growing housing needs in Transylvania County. Staff incorporated their feedback into the request for proposals (RFP) with a specified scope of work for a study. The RFP yielded four proposals from Bowen National, Points Consulting, RKG, and TPMA. Administration and Planning Department staff reviewed the proposals and determined that all are legitimate firms for housing study type work with qualified professional staff at various levels. None of the firms are based in North Carolina, but three of the four firms have performed work in the State. Bowen and TPMA have the most experience in North Carolina.

The timelines for completion ranged from six to nine months and the costs ranged from \$39,000- \$94,000. Bowen National and Points Consulting submitted incomplete proposals based on the RFP document provided to submitters. In addition, the Bowen National proposal specifically identified two elements of the study that their firm is unable to complete. The TPMA proposal demonstrates the greatest ability to complete the full scope of work listed in the RFP. Their proposal is higher than the others and will take longer to complete; however, the project falls within the amount of funding awarded by Dogwood.

Staff recommended the Board authorize staff to negotiate a contract with TPMA for the housing study and begin work. The Manager informed the Commissioners that she intends to bring a proposal back before them to approve the structure for a task force, provided that they approve the recommendation to move forward.

Commissioner Chapman stated that he supported moving forward with conducting the study. He stated that the Board continually hears there are critical demands for housing but there is not much data to support the claims. He commented that he would not have been supportive of the study without Dogwood providing grant funding. He was concerned that the housing solution would involve government intervention because the private sector would have found a solution if it were profitable.

Commissioner McCall supported the study but said she would not be in favor of the County entering into any type of agreement to construct housing. She was interested in seeing the results of the study. She commented that most people define affordable housing differently and that there appears to be no definitive definition to describe affordable housing.

Commissioner Casciato stated that another obstacle to affordable housing is the availability of land. He supported the study as well but noted there are many different components involved with housing.

Commissioner Dalton said his understanding is that affordable/workforce housing must be located within a certain proximity of a school, pharmacy, grocery store, etc. The Manager responded that an affordable housing project is intended to serve people who make at least 80% below the median household income. To qualify for tax credits, the income level would need to be closer to 60% and the units must have access to those basic amenities and other facilities. This has been one of the challenges the County has faced in trying to attract tax credit projects because our basic amenities are located within a small geographic area, so

finding available land within the proximity requirements has been difficult. The Manager pointed out the study will review these issues as well as opportunities that would not necessarily use tax credit components. The study will also include a sample pro forma of current housing prices to determine whether they could develop a project using current land costs.

Commissioner Dalton pointed out that some areas of the County have some of the basic amenities, but not all of them. Parcels within the City of Brevard have also been considered but were met with opposition from neighbors. He felt it would be positive to have a report of what is available to develop a strategy to move forward. He supported the concept of an affordable housing project without the tax credits, but he was unsure how feasible that would be given current construction costs.

Commissioner Chapman asked if the firm has completed a study for a similar-sized community and whether they would be willing to share the report. The Manager stated that TPMA included in their proposal a study from Greenville, SC although it is not of comparable size. The RFP specifically outlined that the study must be consistent with North Carolina laws and statutes. She will ask TPMA to share any studies of small counties they may have conducted.

Commissioner Casciato asked if HUD had been considered. The Manager stated that one of the biggest problems staff has identified for HUD is how they set the Section 8 housing rate which is what they consider to be fair market rent. They typically show Transylvania County's fair market rent being behind Buncombe County even though our housing costs are higher both for rental and purchasing. HUD has adopted a methodology that reviews urban areas. Staff worked through Congressman Meadows's office a few years ago and at that time, officials in Washington, DC did not envision the methodology changing.

Chairman Chappell agreed with the staff's recommendation. Of the responses, TPMA submitted the best proposal. He had hoped to receive a proposal from a North Carolina-based firm or one that had experience in communities of like size, as well as communities that have temperate rainforest climate like ours. He was thankful to Dogwood for the funding. Chairman Chappell felt that Transylvania County would be better off in the long term if such a study were conducted.

Commissioner Dalton moved to approve for staff to negotiate a contract with TPMA for the countywide housing study and to begin work, seconded by Commissioner Chapman and unanimously approved.

NEW BUSINESS

CONSIDERATION OF 2024 COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT

The Manager stated that the Board of Commissioners' policy sets the annual cost of living (COLA) based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the year prior and is issued in January of each year. The COLA is intended to support the retention of the existing workforce and remain current with the general market changes. It is also intended to provide pay increases to employees to keep up with inflation and maintain the rate of pay relative to the market; however, it does not advance employees based on performance or experience. Therefore, each year when staff brings forth the COLA recommendation, they have not recommended moving employees within the ranges to avoid compression.

With the implementation of the 2019 and 2023 pay plans came policy changes adopted for on-call and COLA and updates to Article III: Pay Plan of the Personnel Policy. Staff have not presented the incorporated and formatted changes to the Personnel Policy to the Board as of this date. Staff included the updated Personnel Policy in the Board's agenda packet for approval.

Each budget year, staff projects a COLA percentage for the upcoming budget based on the best information available. Staff must request additional funding if the CPI report in January exceeds the projection based on the Board's policy. For the FY 2024 Budget, staff projected a 4% COLA increase. The CPI issued in January reflected a 3.4% increase so there are budgeted funds available for the annual COLA.

The Manager recommended the Board authorize the FY 2024 COLA at 3.4% for non-probationary employees with available budgeted funds. To avoid compression, the salary schedule will not be changed by the COLA percentage and will remain as it was effective July 2023. She also asked the Board to confirm the reformatted Article III to be updated in the Personnel Policy with previously approved pay plan changes.

Chairman Chappell stated he was thankful that the COLA remained with the projections. In recent years, the COLA has exceeded the projected percentage.

Commissioner Chapman asked if the Manager anticipated any significant movement in the upcoming budget in terms of salaries. The Manager stated she has been reviewing the revenue projections for next year's budget. There are some early indications of a slowdown in spending levels which impacts sales tax revenue. However, the slowdown has not been as significant for Transylvania County as it has been for other counties. The projections for the current year are robust. The Board will need to be more conservative with next year's budget for sales tax projections. The growth between the property tax and sales tax is enough to cover the COLA increases for the full year. Personnel is the largest expense in the County's budget. The Manager shared that she expects to receive requests for several budget increases in the upcoming fiscal year.

Commissioner McCall moved to authorize the FY 2024 COLA for non-probationary employees with available budgeted funds. To avoid compression, the salary schedule will not be changed by the COLA percentage and will remain as it was effective July 2023. She also moved for the Board to confirm the reformatted Article III to be updated in the Personnel Policy with previously approved pay plan changes. Commissioner Dalton seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

PRELIMINARY PRESENTATION OF FUTURE PROJECT REQUESTS AT ROSMAN ELEMENTARY AND ROSMAN HIGH SCHOOL

Before presenting the information to the Board, the Manager invited the Superintendent of Transylvania County Schools Dr. Lisa Fletcher to the podium to answer questions the Board may have.

The Manager stated that staff did not expect the Board to make a decision at this meeting on the project requests for Rosman Elementary and High Schools, but she felt it was important for the Board to be aware of the information that Transylvania County Schools staff recently presented to the Board of Education.

The projects are the HVAC replacement for Rosman Elementary School (RES) and the football field drainage for Rosman High School (RHS). At the request of the Board of Education, the Board of Commissioners approved the HVAC project in FY 2022 for \$185,000, and the football field drainage in FY 2024 for \$325,000. Both projects now require additional funding.

For the HVAC replacement project, Transylvania County Schools staff found an issue where the fire-rated ceiling and roof were not made to the one-hour fire rating as shown in the 1999 renovation plans. This is a life safety issue that must be addressed and will require an additional \$300,000 over and above the HVAC replacement cost, which is now higher than the original projection of \$185,000. The RHS football field drainage will also require more funding to fix. During the evaluation, Transylvania County Schools staff brought forth the consideration of evaluating the cost of turf vs. repairing the field as is.

The Manager stated that both of these projects are examples that illustrate the purpose and work of the education capital workgroup. The Manager, Dr. Fletcher, a retired county manager, and a retired superintendent serve on the workgroup with the firm Axias who is conducting the building assessments. Having qualified assessments of all facilities to base a multi-year capital plan facilitates better estimates and opportunities to evaluate alternatives to develop an eventual funding plan.

For instance, the Boards may want to consider the option that the Board of Education has discussed for RES to use a geothermal heating and cooling system versus a traditional one, despite the additional cost. They may also want to consider turf versus repairing the damage as is at RHS. The Manager stated it is important that the Board of Commissioners takes a comprehensive approach to spending the additional dollars because the staff has seen other critical needs emerge during the assessment process. Taking a comprehensive approach will help facilitate better decisions.

The Manager emphasized the importance of having a funding plan. Having accurate project costs is critical to establishing a funding plan. Smaller projects that may or may not reoccur on an annual basis, may be funded with revenue collections. The County has limited funds and is governed by the Local Government Commission in terms of financing and selling the bonds. The process to sell bonds is extensive and the County must also be able to show the LGC that it is capable of repaying. The Manager stated that the Board of Commissioners could decide to sell the bonds in smaller tranches, maybe two tranches of \$30 million each, but not project by project. Local governments in North Carolina have limited debt options to fund large projects. The Board would be pledging property tax to pay the bond debt as agreed upon by the taxpayers when the bond was passed. For a limited obligation bond, the Board would also pledge property tax to make the payments on the debt.

The outcome of the collaborative workgroup will give both Boards an assessment of the facilities and the information they need to develop a multi-year capital plan and to allow for the fiscal planning to occur.

The Manager, after discussion with Superintendent Fletcher, made two recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. The first recommendation is to fold these two projects into the workgroup's assessment of the eight school facilities. This continues the goal of taking a comprehensive approach. The second recommendation is for the Manager, Superintendent Fletcher, and the project staff for each organization to begin meeting monthly to ensure both Boards are receiving information timely and can develop plans to handle these critical capital decisions. Dr. Fletcher agreed to this arrangement. The Manager shared that both Finance Director are discussing coordination of payments every quarter to better facilitate moving capital projects forward.

Dr. Fletcher thanked the Board of Commissioners for their support of the School System. She stated that the Manager did a great job of explaining their needs. She looked forward to seeing the workgroup's final report.

Chairman Chappell called for comments and questions from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Casciato asked about the timeline for completing projects once the Boards are presented with the workgroup's final report. The Manager stated that the report will provide options for both Boards to consider. The timeline for moving forward will depend on the two Boards working together to identify projects and determine financing options. If the Commissioners decide to utilize the bond funding method, they will need to identify the projects that fall within that process. The Manager reemphasized that selling bonds is an extensive process. The County must meet with a bond agency, take certain steps to meet the LGC requirements and gain approval of the application by the LGC. The process also includes the Commissioners' plans to pledge repayment. The Manager pointed out that the rates have changed since the original payment plans were projected, so the Board of Commissioners will need to revise the payment plans. She stated that

this factor does not prohibit the Board from moving forward with critical items fairly quickly. She expected the workgroup to recommend moving quickly on areas that have been deemed critical.

Chairman Chappell agreed with the Manager that the Board should review the report from the workgroup in a comprehensive way to ensure they are making the biggest impact systemwide. He was appreciative of the School System's wanting the Board of Commissioners to be aware of these two projects that the Manager presented, but he strongly felt they needed to be included in the full report.

Commissioner Chapman stated that when evaluating the possibility of putting turf on the football field at RHS, the full cost, including maintenance and replacement costs, be considered. He also stated that once the critical needs of the schools are met using the bond monies, the Boards can then be more innovative in how they make improvements to the facilities versus seemingly always being in emergency mode. The Manager agreed and stated the importance of having qualified assessments of the buildings to assist with scheduling major replacements, but also to aid in developing a multi-year funding plan for capital projects. This will help to smooth out expenses over time and avoid unforeseen spikes in spending.

Commissioner Chapman stressed the importance of having realistic cost figures before moving forward on any of the projects identified in the assessment.

Commissioner McCall asked for clarification that RES and RHS projects will be added to the full assessment study and that these projects will not delay the receipt of the report. The Manager reported that the study already included an assessment of RES. The assessment process involves evaluating buildings as they currently are and determining what is needed. It does not include alternatives to address those needs. That decision will be up to the two Boards. The Manager confirmed that adding these projects will not delay the receipt of the report to the Boards.

Commissioner McCall asked if the issues at RES needed to be addressed immediately and could not wait until the final report. The Manager said the fire system issues at RES were identified as a life safety issue and at an estimated cost of \$300,000. The challenge is that the report from School System staff articulates that the fire system needs to be combined with the roof and HVAC replacement because all those systems connect. If the two Boards want to address that issue now, it would be easier to fund by delaying other projects that have already been approved. The other option is for the Boards to prioritize the critical needs at RES as the first project. Dr. Fletcher concurred with the Manager's statements and said it makes sense based on the complexity of the project to replace everything at one time.

The Manager added that the Boards could make the project more manageable and leverage funding sooner by replacing the system with the existing type of system. The two Boards must make this decision. She noted that the Board of Education's discussions have leaned toward a geothermal system. It does, however, increase the cost significantly.

Mr. Kerry Putnam, Facilities Director for Transylvania County Schools, came forth to the podium to provide some additional details to the Board about these two projects. The Board of Commissioners had the detailed report in their agenda packet.

Commissioner McCall asked about the projected timeframe for the Board's receiving the completed report. The Manager stated that the next full workgroup meeting is on February 18. Provided everything goes well at that meeting, the workgroup would be able to present the report along with options shortly thereafter. The workgroup intends to present options that are feasible and make sense. She pointed out the more challenging part will be the two Boards coming together to agree on the next steps. The assessment revealed that there are critical components that will need to be addressed quickly for all campuses.

Commissioner McCall asked for clarification on the Manager's recommendation to involve the project team and asked for clarification on who would be involved in those meetings. The Manager suggested that she, Assistant County Manager David McNeill, Dr. Fletcher, and Mr. Putnam start meeting regularly about projects to ensure everyone is on the same page and that information is being shared consistently with both Boards so that the two Boards can make quality decisions together. The Manager shared that the County utilizes a project team internally for all projects and she has found great benefit in having that collaboration among different people with different backgrounds and perspectives because it produces a better product in the end.

Commissioner Dalton inquired about how the School System used the \$11 million in ESSR funds they received that were specifically designed to be used toward HVAC and air handlers and coolers, etc. Mr. Putnam responded that much of those funds are being spent on HVAC replacements and air handlers at other schools and as part of a longer-term piping project at Pisgah Forest Elementary School. Commissioner Dalton noted the Board of Commissioners funded the PFES piping project over two years ago. The Manager reported the project was paid for by a combination of County funding and lottery funding, not ESSR funding.

Commissioner McCall stated there has been a severe lack of preventative maintenance at all the school facilities which has led to problems continuing to worsen. She was excited about the path forward that will make a difference for the students and staff in Transylvania County Schools.

There was no further discussion.

FY 2024 2ND QUARTER BUDGET AMENDMENTS

Budget and Management Analyst Jennifer Wright presented the budget amendments to the Board for approval. Based on policies approved by the Board of Commissioners through the annual budget ordinance and the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act, the Board of Commissioners must approve certain amendments to the budget ordinance. Ms. Wright asked the Board to approve Budget Amendments 17, 18, and 21. The others have already been approved and for information purposes only.

- Budget Amendment 15: Appropriate an additional \$70,000 from the Educational Capital Fund to the Capital Work Study Group for the School Safety & Security Study, the School Reserve Study, and related projects approved by the Board.
- Budget Amendment 16: Record a \$208,908 increase in PSAP funding from the NC 9-1-1 Board. After initially reducing funding based on the County exceeding the 20% allowable carryforward from FY 2023, the 9-1-1 Board reversed its decision on 9/29/23 and approved Transylvania County's FY 2024 request not to be reduced.
- Budget Amendment 17: Decrease the Community Center Grant funds by \$14,094 to correct an overstatement of funds remaining after FY 2023.
- Budget Amendment 18: Transfer \$1,500 in funds from COSSAP Contract Services to COSSAP Travel & Training to meet training needs.
- Budget Amendment 19: Reflect the implementation of the Board-approved salary study through a transfer of \$1.7 million from the pay increase line to salary, FICA, and retirement budgets. The salary study went into effect on 7/1/23; this action adjusts budgets to meet related needs.
- Budget Amendment 20: Record two TCTDA grants to the County for the Light Up the Night event on 12/1/23: \$4,000 to Parks & Recreation to support the skating rink; and \$4,900 to County Administration to replace decorations for the Christmas tree.
- Budget Amendment 21: Allocate an additional \$13,768 in DFC and COSSAP grant funds to correctly reflect a grant-funded employee's salary split, while reducing allocated DHT funds by \$11,202.

- Budget Amendment 22: Transfer \$100,000 from 9-1-1 Communications - Building Improvements to 9-1-1 Communications – Other Equipment to help complete the Board-approved purchase of new console furniture.

Commissioner Casciato moved to approve budget amendments 17, 18, and 21, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

FY 2024 2ND QUARTER FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Finance Director Meagan O’Neal presented the FY 2024 2nd quarter financial summary to the Board. Fiscal controls require that the Finance Director report unaudited financial statements for each quarter to the Commissioners. This report covers the first half of the fiscal year from July 1-December 31. Below is a summary of her report.

- Key Revenue Points
 - Property tax revenue: \$39,768,976 which is approximately 92% of the budget
 - Sales tax revenue: \$3,665,792; only 30% of budget due to lag time in the receipt of these funds; budgeted conservatively; statewide sales down over the last two months compared to last year; Transylvania County saw a downward trend in only one of those months; other market indicators predict a slowdown in the market
 - Investment earnings: \$1,135,150; already 160% of budget; budgeted cautiously because developments in the market can change the outcome very quickly
- General Fund
 - Personnel and Operating expenses are at or below 50% of budget
 - Expenses over the 50% mark because of the timing of payments or purchases
 - Insurances (92%), Other Organizations (68%), Nonprofit Agencies (95%) & Equipment (80%)
- Solid Waste
 - \$1,500,563 total revenues
 - \$1 million in Woodruff Landfill fees, \$317,605 in sticker sales, additional other fees, and interest
 - Personnel and Operating expenses maintaining at or below 50% of budget
 - Overall net loss of \$36,000 in the enterprise fund
- Project Funds
 - Education Capital: Transylvania County Schools
 - Over \$824,000 in projects paid out in 2nd quarter which completed six school projects
 - The water/sewer project on Highway 64 is complete and came in under budget which will free up ARPA funds for other projects
 - EMS Base is on track financially and is expected to be completed in March
 - Kickoff for the Brevard/Rosman water interconnect happened last week
- Looking forward:
 - Large financing purchases: school capital bonds & courthouse
 - Long-term planning
 - Follow State regulations
 - Debt issuance guidelines from the State are updated frequently
 - Ensure we plan budgetary and financially to have the best outcome

Ms. O’Neal recommended approval of the report as presented.

Chairman Chappell responded to comments and accusations that this Board has no goals or accomplishments by highlighting the \$824,000 in projects that have been paid out for the completion of several school projects,

the water and sewer extension project along US 64 which will have generational impacts on Transylvania County, the new EMS Base that will impact everyone who picks up the phone to call 9-1-1 with an emergency, and the interconnect of Brevard and Rosman's water system to ensure no interruption of service. He congratulated the Commissioners and staff for a job well done.

Commissioner Chapman asked how the savings from the water and sewer project would be utilized. The Manager responded that the Board of Commissioners may allocate those funds toward another infrastructure project. Staff will bring back recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on how to use those funds once the water and sewer project is formally closed out.

Commissioner McCall asked for details on the school projects that have been completed. Ms. O'Neal reported those projects included roofs, window leak repairs, a chiller replacement, paving, playground, etc. and many of them came under budget.

Commissioner Dalton asked if there were any restrictions placed on the monies the County received for the landfill expansion and other projects and whether the reporting requirements placed an additional burden on the staff. The Manager said it would create more work just like any grant funding in terms of reporting. The County had an audit finding related to grant reporting, which is not surprising given the number of grants the County has received over the last couple of years with no change in the staffing level. With Ms. O'Neal's guidance, the staff is organizing files and catching up on the grant reporting requirements.

Commissioners commended Ms. O'Neal for her work as the new Finance Director and thanked her for the financial report.

Commissioner Chappell moved to receive the report, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

COMMISSIONERS SUPPORT FOR NCACC FILM "THE VETERAN'S BATTLEFIELD"

Commissioner Chapman requested to add this item to the agenda. Last week he was made aware that the Board of Commissioners had not formally approved supporting the showing of "The Veteran's Battlefield" film that was produced by the NC Association of County Commissioners. He prematurely made posters and a press release stating it was supported by the Board of Commissioners. The budgetary impact has been minimal. Commissioner Chapman asked the Board to formally support the showing of the film on February 3.

Commissioner Chapman moved for Board support of the showing of "The Veteran's Battlefield" produced by the NCACC, seconded by Commissioner Casciato and unanimously approved.

MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager reported the following:

- Kudos to Operations, Human Resources, and EMS for prioritizing safety and ensuring proper records and protocols are in place. We had an unplanned NCDOL/OSHA inspection for EMS, and all was in order with only one finding that the inspection card on the fire extinguisher in the white house had not been signed. That was rectified before the inspector left.
- A video showing a kayaker go over Looking Glass Falls during recent floods has raised a lot of questions from citizens.
 - This specific incident did not result in the need for rescue personnel, but it was extremely dangerous and could have ended differently. Transylvania County Emergency Services responds to rescues in the Forest each year that generate additional expenses for taxpayers and that are not covered by federal or State funds. These rescues also put first responder personnel in danger themselves. Rescues range from unforeseen accidents to visitors who underestimate their abilities for various recreational activities in the Forest. This serves as a

reminder that people should think about their actions and be cognizant of the impact their actions have on local government emergency services.

- The waterfall safety campaign will be coordinated again with the TCTDA for this year. Every year our county experiences deaths due to people climbing waterfalls or playing too close to them. While they are beautiful to view, they can be very dangerous.
- Kudos to Emergency Services staff and partner agencies for their response during the recent flooding. Particularly we want to highlight five first responders who had to be rescued during a mission to save three citizens in floodwaters. Three are county employees: Chase and Chad Owen and Shannon Ropp. The other two were Katie Hatter and Chris Whitlock. All five were rescued but were in very cold water and in danger for some time. Additionally, the Connestee and Toxaway Fire Departments and the Rescue Squad suffered significant equipment damage during the rescue which the Board may learn more about during the budget preparation. We are thankful the three citizens and the first responders are okay. That is a testament to what emergency management does every day.
- There is an extra week in between this meeting and the 1st meeting in February. The next Board of Commissioners meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 12 at 4:00 p.m. Upcoming agenda items:
 - Semi-annual reports from County departments, two-hour run time
 - Courthouse architect selection and next steps
 - Education capital work study report
 - Building assessment systemwide including the specialized mold and safety studies that were included later in the process
 - Project projections for cost by year
 - Options for the Boards to consider

Commissioner Dalton asked if officials could charge the kayaker with trespassing because there were several signs posted above the falls. The kayaker essentially accessed the falls by trespassing. The Manager responded that an email from Ranger Dave Casey with the Forest Service indicated that the kayaker did not break any laws.

The Manager shared that she will not be able to attend the February 3 showing of “The Veteran’s Battlefield” film because her daughter will be participating in a regional wrestling tournament.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Rodke: Ms. Rodke stated that the Board must make fixing the roofs in the K-12 schools a priority over the community college right now. She said there has been a lack of communication and bickering between the two Boards over the last four years. Due to the lack of action by the Board of Commissioners, the costs have risen exponentially. Ms. Rodke was glad that communication between the two Boards is improving. She encouraged the Board to focus on the safety of the schools rather than a new football field.

COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

Commissioner Chapman shared that he and Commissioners Dalton and McCall were in Raleigh this past week attending NCACC Steering Committee meetings. He serves on the Public Safety Committee. The committee members discussed issues around incarcerations and the opioid epidemic. Commissioner Chapman was sad to share the recent passing of a local teenager by suicide. He pointed out that during the Public Safety Committee meeting, he was shocked to learn that three of the 20+ county commissioners in attendance had lost a child. The current NCACC President Johnny Carswell from Burke County lost a child to an overdose. For that reason, Mr. Carswell’s presidential initiative is “One More Thing” which focuses on empowering counties to invest opioid settlement dollars for the greatest impact. The idea came to him after the loss of his child and his constant wondering if there was one more thing he could have done. Commissioner Chapman asked the public to keep the family of the teenager in their thoughts and prayers and to also ask themselves in

situations where people are struggling with mental health issues or addiction if there was one more they could do.

Commissioner Dalton responded to comments from the second public comment period. He stated that in March three years ago, the Board of Commissioners approved Option A. The Board of Education requested bids for the projects named in Option A and the bids came in over \$80 million, much higher than the \$68 million bond. The Board of Education scrapped Option A and descope the projects. Brevard High School had been pared down to a new gym, an admin wing, and a cafeteria and did nothing to replace roofs, add student space, or any other remodeling. The projects had been reduced in scope as well. As a way to move forward, the two Boards formed this collaborative group to evaluate all the schools. The collaboration has revealed there are critical needs in all the school facilities. Otherwise, if the Board of Education had moved forward with Option A, there would be two partially new schools and no available funds to address the other needs without going back to the taxpayers. He encouraged citizens to become more informed because these issues have been addressed in numerous County Commission meetings. Commissioner Dalton also pointed out that the Board of Commissioners has funded several projects that have yet to be completed, have recently been completed, or are ongoing. So, he becomes aggravated when this Board is accused of not caring about the schools.

Chairman Chappell took personally the accusations about the Board not caring about the schools because he and other Commissioners have children, grandchildren, and other family members attending Transylvania County Schools. He assured the public that the Board is deliberating addressing those needs while trying to make the most impact with taxpayer dollars. Chairman Chappell also addressed comments made during the first public comment period about the Board not having any goals. He read aloud the rest of his statements from the newspaper article quoted in part here: "I believe this upcoming year will be the best and most important in our county's history. Your board of commissioners will be addressing items that will have an impact on Transylvania County for years to come. We continue to see announcements and investments in our county that will greatly impact our community in positive ways. These investments will provide more resources and opportunities for our citizens and help chart our future. On behalf of the board of county commissioners, I want to thank each and every citizen for what you bring to our wonderful community. It is my sincere hope and prayer that this upcoming year will be the best each of you has ever experienced. We have a rich and vibrant history in Transylvania County, and I firmly believe we also have a rich and vibrant future ahead."

Chairman Chappell moved to enter into closed session per N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 (a) (4) To discuss the location or expansion of businesses or other industries in the area served by the public body, following a 10-minute recess, seconded by Commissioner McCall and unanimously carried.

CLOSED SESSION

Pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 (a) (4) To discuss the location or expansion of businesses or other industries in the area served by the public body, a closed session was entered into at 9:05 p.m. Present were Chairman Chappell, Commissioners Casciato, Chapman, Dalton and McCall, County Manager Jaime Laughter, Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Burton Hodges, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan. County Attorney John Kubis participated via Zoom meeting software.

Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Burton Hodges updated the Board of Commissioners on several potential economic development projects. The Board of Commissioners gave guidance and directed staff on how to proceed.

Chairman Chappell moved to leave the closed session, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

OPEN SESSION

Chairman Chappell moved to seal the minutes of the closed session until such time that opening the minutes does not frustrate the purpose of the closed session, seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Chairman Chappell moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 p.m., seconded by Commissioner Dalton and unanimously carried.**

Jason R. Chappell, Chairman
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board