

**MINUTES**  
**TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**February 22, 2016 – REGULAR MEETING**

The Board of Commissioners of Transylvania County met in regular session on Monday, February 22, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. in Commissioners Chambers at the County Administration Building.

Commissioners present were Vice-Chairman Larry Chapman, Jason Chappell, Chairman Mike Hawkins, Page Lemel and Kelvin Phillips. Also present were County Manager Jaime Laughter, County Attorney Tony Dalton and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan.

Media: *The Transylvania Times* – Derek McKissock

There were over 25 people in the audience.

In a special presentation this evening, the Brevard and Rosman High School Marine Corps JROTC presented our nation's colors and lead the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance. This is a new program for our local school system. They are ambitious and ready to be involved in public service for our community.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Mike Hawkins presiding declared a quorum was present and called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

**WELCOME**

Chairman Hawkins welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the members of the audience for participating in their County government. He introduced Commissioners and staff in attendance.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Edwin Jones: Mr. Jones noted that during several of the departmental presentations at the previous meeting, he heard comments about issues with motor vehicles. He wondered if the County has a comprehensive maintenance program for vehicles and equipment. He believes such a program could potentially save the County over \$100,000 if implemented.

Judith West: Ms. West stated she does not believe the most recent appointment to the Planning Board was done open or honestly. She quoted sections of the policy and procedures for making appointments which was passed by the Board last year. The policy states that applications would be forwarded to the citizen advisory councils for review and that a written recommendation may be sent to the Board by the chair of the citizen advisory council. The policy also outlines criteria by which candidates are evaluated. Ms. West stated there is no evidence of any review or evaluation prior to the appointment of Daryle Hogsed, nor was there a recommendation made by the Planning Board facilitator or chair. In her opinion, she does not believe Mr. Hogsed would be a positive influence on the Planning Board. Ms. West urged the Board to follow its own policy and evaluate procedures when the Board decides not to reappoint a current member and also to appoint applicants who possess contributive potential.

## AGENDA MODIFICATIONS

The Manager reported on the agenda modifications. She requested to remove Item VIII.A Silvermont Contract with Harris Architects, PLLC under New Business (item to be considered at a later date) and to add Item XI.A Closed Session per NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (4) to discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of business in the area served by this body.

**Commissioner Lemel moved to accept the modified agenda, seconded by Commissioner Chapman and unanimously approved.**

## CONSENT AGENDA

**Commissioner Lemel moved to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded by Commissioner Chappell and unanimously approved.**

The following items were approved:

### MINUTES

Commissioners met in regular session on Monday, February 8, 2016. Following the regular business, Commissioners held a workshop to hear presentations from department heads on their departmental accomplishments, trends and goals. Commissioners approved the minutes of the February 8, 2016 regular meeting as submitted.

### DISCOVERY, RELEASE AND MONTHLY SETTLEMENT REPORT

Each month the Tax Administrator has a listing of proposed releases for that month. The Board of Commissioners has the responsibility of approving the release. Total tax dollars released was \$215.85 and refunds totaled \$935.59. Commissioners approved the January 2016 Discovery, Release and Monthly Settlement Report.

### FLOOD DAMAGE CONTROL FEES – WAIVER FOR SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

During the year, the Soil and Water Conservation District and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services assist local farmers and property owners to rehabilitate property near rivers and streams that are in the floodplain. In late January, the Chairman of the Transylvania Soil and Water Conservation District requested that the \$75 permit fee be waived on the basis that these projects are closely monitored and approved by Soil and Water Conservation Service staff rather than Planning and Community Development staff. Staff recommends that a permit be required, but that the permit fee be waived. Staff further recommends that upon the successful completion of the project that Soil and Water Conservation District staff notify the Planning and Community Development Department staff by letter. The financial impact of waiving the fee depends on the number of permits issued which range from one to five permits per year. Commissioners approved a waiver of Flood Damage Control Ordinance fees for Transylvania County Soil and Water Conservation District and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services projects.

### 340B FEE SCHEDULE REVISION

The 340B program allows local health departments to buy select contraceptives at a significant cost savings. Revised program guidelines require that all health departments charge only acquisition costs for select contraceptives. The financial impact is the loss of current mark-up of impacted contraceptive methods. The Transylvania County Board of Health approved the revised 340B fee schedule at its February 9, 2016 meeting. Commissioners approved the revised fee schedule as submitted.

## **PRESENTATIONS/RECOGNITIONS**

### PRESENTATION BY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Brevard/Transylvania Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Clark Lovelace and Brad Campbell with Market Connections made a presentation to the Board with regards to the Tourism Development Authority's (TDA) multi-year marketing plan and survey findings. The TDA is funded through occupancy tax collection so it is important that the TDA keeps Commissioners updated on what is going on with the organization, as well as with travel and tourism locally.

This is a summary of the presentation:

#### *Mission*

To generate and enhance tourism opportunities in Transylvania County through strategic promotion coordinated with tourism-related businesses and local government, and to contribute to a vibrant, sustainable economy.

Equally important is the impact on the community. Mr. Lovelace offered some statistics from 2013. The economic impact of travel and tourism in Transylvania County is \$84 million, which includes 740 jobs directly attributable to travel and tourism which makes nearly \$15 million in payroll dollars. In addition, travel and tourism generates \$6.9 million in sales tax revenues and \$209 in tax savings to each household in Transylvania County. It is clear that travel and tourism is a key industry.

The goals of tonight's presentation is to update the Board on the work being done by the TDA on behalf of the County, to share outcomes of 2015 travel and research commissioned by the TDA, to provide insights into the competitive travel and tourism landscape that exists regionally, and to communicate top line strategies and tactics of the new multi-year marketing plan. The executive summary was provided to the Board in their agenda packets.

Mr. Campbell presented next, but first he introduced Prentiss Brewer, the staff person for the TDA, and Market Connections President Karen Tessier. This is a summary of the presentation:

#### *How Are We Doing?*

Website visitation has steadily increased since 2010. The website has been redeveloped twice during that time as well. The current website is extremely rich with content, video, insider tips, etc. and is a resource for both citizens and visitors. Website visits in 2015 increased 35% over the previous year. The email database has also been a success. A monthly email newsletter called *The Adventurist* is very popular and is sent to nearly 11,000 people. Facebook has also grown to over 4,000 followers. Most importantly, occupancy tax revenue has grown over the years. The 5% rate has generated almost \$11 million in accommodations revenue, a 7.5% increase over the prior year. This outpaces other Western North Carolina counties that we compete with on a percentage basis.

#### *Special Projects*

The TDA has created a Land of Waterfalls app that can be downloaded for free. It is up-to-date with all the latest accommodations, restaurants, attractions and calendar events. The TDA has also embarked on a project to orient visitors more to everything Transylvania County has to offer. A new kiosk has been placed in downtown that gives an overview of the County and also the major points of interest. The idea behind this was to share with visitors that the whole County has much to offer.

#### *Multi-Year Plan*

The baseline for the multi-year plan is from all the research that was conducted. Google Analytics was used to pull information from the website. They also performed two qualitative and quantitative surveys.

The quantitative survey went out to visitors. The qualitative survey was sent to local businesses. The research was invaluable in allowing the TDA to understand visitors better and gain insight from them to help plan for the future. The TDA exceeded its goal by 30% in terms of number of participants. The surveys were developed in collaboration with Visit NC and they worked hard to develop a survey that was accurate and reflective.

### *Key Findings*

#### **#1 – It's All About the Outdoors.**

When asked what their primary reason for visiting was, nearly 70% of the responses were related to outdoors. The TDA believes outdoor travelers of every stripe have the potential to drive visitation throughout the year, including shoulder seasons, in an even more meaningful and sustainable way.

#### **#2 – Outdoor Experiences Draw Visitors – Food, Festivals, Music and Culture Keep Them Here.**

New events, attractions and dining establishments are complementing a strong mix of well-established activities. Transylvania County is becoming a more complete, well-rounded destination which strengthens the TDA's ability to convert day trip visitors, attract more overnight visitors and increase multi-night stays.

#### **#3 – Transylvania County: Still the Land of Many Happy Returns.**

When asked how many times they have visited Transylvania County, just over 31% of respondents said too many times to mention. About 60% in total had visited between five times and too many times to mention. People return to Transylvania County again and again. This is one of the major strengths of the County.

Summer camps and long-established traditions like Brevard Music Center have made Transylvania County an annual tourism touchstone. Legacy visitation has contributed to a stable tourism market. More focused outreach to these key audiences is necessary to help build midweek and shoulder season stays. There has been no decrease in visitation over the last 10 years; on the contrary, it has steadily increased.

#### **#4 – Transylvania County: In the Heart of a Crowded and Competitive Tourism Landscape.**

This insight is perhaps the most challenging. Surrounding counties have a lot more room availability than Transylvania County does. Sometimes the surrounding counties promote the assets of Transylvania County and they benefit from the overnight room visitations and tax dollars. This is an area the TDA is attempting to change.

Lack of room inventory presents real challenges in a highly competitive region. There is a clear limit to how much the County can grow in its overnight tourism without new accommodations.

### *Top 9 Strategies*

#### **Strategy #1 – Foundational.**

Create an annual marketing plan that is aimed at refined target markets using advertising, public relations, collateral, electronic and social media.

### **Strategy #2 – Foundational.**

Through public relations, the TDA continues to tell the Brevard/Transylvania County story, strengthen brand awareness, and inspire visitation. Mr. Campbell announced that a report from the national publication *Travel & Leisure* will be visiting for three days in April. The reporter's husband is a cyclist and is going to ride The Assault on the Carolinas bike ride. The TDA is very excited about the national exposure the County is going to receive.

### **Strategy #3 – Foundational.**

Develop and inspire marketing partnerships with businesses and organizations, both locally and regionally. This year the TDA started a co-op plan where local advertisers can piggyback on our regional and advertising so they can have a presence into national publications. On the regional side, the TDA has developed an amazing relationship with Visit NC. They have visited the County several times and as a result of this relationship, they have provided us with many opportunities.

### **Strategy #4 – Convert day trip visitors to overnight guests.**

At least 30% of the people who come to Transylvania County are day trip visitors. Converting these visitors to overnight guests will make a huge difference to the local tourism economy. A key tactic is a "Play Here. Stay Here" campaign aimed at day trip visitors that targets the areas they most visit, including Pisgah National Forest, Dupont State Recreational Forest, and Gorges State Park.

### **Strategy #5 – Build Shoulder Seasons: November – March, September**

This is a strategy the TDA has just started implementing in the last five days. They developed a mini-campaign to the Midwest, Northeast and Canada. The campaign is all electronic through banner ads and the like. With these efforts, the TDA is attracting all those people who have cabin fever during their long cold winter season and want to come south for cycling, climbing, fly fishing, etc. The TDA has less than one week of metrics from this campaign, but website visits from Canada is up 700%. Obviously this campaign is resonating with this particular audience.

### **Strategy #6 – Build Midweek Overnight Visitation and Extend Existing Overnight Stays.**

In the summer time there are many people here, but midweek things get a little slower. The TDA is trying to get people to extend those vacations into the week. They also want to direct some of those efforts to the summer camps whose parents are dropping their kids off midweek.

### **Strategy #7 – Engage Broader Interest, Opportunities and "Fan" Participation to Build Overall Brand and Destination Recognition Through Enhanced, Integrated Digital Communications.**

This involves Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. The TDA created its Instagram account over the last year and they are always looking for new followers.

### **Strategy #8 – Explore and Develop Group Tour Opportunities with Targeted Niche Audiences.**

There is not a lot of large meeting space in the County, but there are smaller intimate meetings spaces so there is an opportunity to grow the group tourism market. The effort has been mostly focused on individual and family visitation, but the TDA believes there is a wonderful opportunity to bring in small group tours, school groups, religious groups, retreats, etc.

### **Strategy #9 – Revisit and Update Brand Identity.**

The survey asked visitors how they best know us and provided them with three choices: Brevard, Transylvania County and Land of Waterfalls. The surprising answer was that most people know this region as Brevard. Transylvania County came in second followed by Land of Waterfalls. The primary brand the TDA has been using for quite some time still does not resonate as loudly to visitors as Brevard and Transylvania County. Therefore this is an area the TDA wants to examine.

#### *Questions*

Commissioner Chapman asked if the number of available rooms is maxed out year round or only during certain seasons. Mr. Campbell responded that rooms are maxed out during certain times of the year, totaling about eight months. Mr. Lovelace added that the County cannot accommodate corporate travel, only leisure. Another challenge is filling those rooms during the off season. There are hundreds of thousands of visitors coming here, but staying elsewhere.

Chairman Hawkins wondered if Transylvania County is unique in this situation. He believes there must be other areas that deal with these same characteristics of limited business travel, but a remarkable demand for leisure travel a majority of the year. He suggested researching peer area to determine how they handle such situations. Furthermore, in terms of inputs into the economy, a hotel may cost \$100+/night and that alone is a big deal, if for no other reason than sales tax. Mr. Campbell agreed and noted to add to that being able to stay here may cause the visitor to purchase one or two additional meals that they would not have done otherwise.

Chairman Hawkins stated that the TDA has talked about trying to piggyback on the wayfinding project the City of Brevard completed and he asked Mr. Lovelace to speak about this. Mr. Lovelace said the TDA partnered with the City on the project. The TDA wants to target the various entry points and educate those individuals about the entire County and other resources we have to offer. The TDA feels it would be worth continuing the wayfinding effort throughout the County in strategic locations. He hopes the County will partner with the TDA on this project.

Commissioner Lemel said she was stunned to learn about the percentage of her business that comes out of metro-Atlanta, but yet Atlanta was at the bottom of the list of marketed cities. Mr. Lovelace said one of the surveys indicated many customers come here from Atlanta. He said camps in particular are another opportunity of attracting people here. Part of the strategy is to get those parents to stay here for one or two nights after dropping off the kids at summer camp. Mr. Campbell noted that Atlanta is one of the top metro areas in which we pull visitors, but the problem is that Atlanta is extremely expensive from a media and advertising standpoint; therefore, the TDA's advertising dollars go into markets because it is more cost effective. Ms. Tessier added that website traffic from Atlanta is very heavy during particular times of the year, but the marketing has to be specific and targeted in order to make a difference.

Commissioner Chapman asked what the TDA is doing to reach out to current businesses to learn about what might add to the success of their businesses, especially those that cater to the tourist industry. Mr. Lovelace stated the survey is a good example. Also the work that went into creating the mobile app has resulted in a database with very important information. The TDA intends to email the Executive Summary of this report to the tourism related businesses this week. They have always had a close relationship with the accommodations industry and they keep in frequent contact with them.

Commissioner Chappell asked Mr. Lovelace to mention the grant program offered by the TDA. Mr. Lovelace reported that over the past year they have provided over \$30,000 in small grants. The program allows local entities to apply for grants of up to \$2,000 for purposes such as marketing and sponsorship.

While tourism is what drives it, it also has a local and tourism benefit as well. The money is reinvested back into the community.

Commissioner Chapman said the most important issue facing the County is economic development. He asked the TDA to speak about the interaction between the TDA and Transylvania Economic Alliance. Mr. Lovelace stated there is a loosely based partnership with TEA. The Executive Director joined the TDA at the retreat last week to specifically talk about tourism economic development and accommodations economic development. They also speak on a regular basis including a conversation with an industry consultant who specifically focuses on the acquisition of accommodations and ways to partner.

Commissioner Phillips asked if there was a strategy during the peak seasons to alert and match individuals/families to other accommodations like near Asheville Regional Airport in order to avoid losing the tourism dollars altogether because of lack of accommodations in Transylvania County. Mr. Lovelace pointed out that during the peak seasons they are regularly communicating with accommodations throughout the County. There are very few large establishments, but several smaller accommodations. They then try to match visitors to available accommodations. With that said, there has not been a specific program to outreach to surrounding counties.

Chairman Hawkins thanked Mr. Lovelace, the TDA board and staff, Market Connections, and the County Finance Office for the work they do.

Lastly, it was noted that the TDA is doing a joint presentation with TEA in the near future with more than 50 stakeholders.

## APPOINTMENTS

### PERSONNEL BOARD

Health Director Elaine Russell serves on the Board of Health in the department head position. Her term expires at the end of February. There are no other applications on file. It is the recommendation of Human Resources Director Sheila Cozart to reappoint her to a full term.

The Clerk recently learned that Nancy Stricker will be retiring soon from TVS and therefore resigned her position on the Personnel Board. There are no applications on file to fill her position at this time. The Personnel Board meets this week and will discuss recruitment for this vacancy.

**Commissioner Lemel moved to reappoint Elaine Russell as the department head representative to the Personnel Board, seconded simultaneously by Commissioners Chappell and Phillips and unanimously approved.**

## NEW BUSINESS

### MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager reported the following:

- Meeting occurred today between the County, City of Brevard and Town of Rosman to discuss water; at the March 11 meeting of the Transylvania Natural Resources Council a presentation by McGill Associates will outline the water needs over a 40-50 year time horizon; next steps will begin looking at strategies to meet the need and how to partner with the local governmental entities
- Property revaluation letters will be mailed by the end of February

- Additional primary will be in June for US Congressional races only; the March 15 primary is still on for the other races
- Met with School Administration and Board of Education representatives last week and continued discussion on the school funding formula
- Point of Dispensing exercise will be conducted tomorrow and Wednesday; this is a State requirement, but it also helps us with having procedures in place during a catastrophic event
- Revised budget workshop schedule: May 12, 16 and 26; will only meet as needed to meet consensus
- Kudos!
  - Maintenance for help rearranging offices to meet employee needs (Bart Renner, Co-op Extension)
  - Animal Control and Sheriff's Office for helping a neighborhood resolve horse concerns
  - Citizen Jodi Bearden thanks to Animal Control Officer Donny Cantrell
  - Sheriff's Office for winning a grant for \$40k to combat internet crimes against children
  - Animal Control and CHAT adoption event at shelter adopting out three dogs and one cat Saturday (door prizes and raffle)
  - Early Childhood Initiative Task Force from both NC Deputy Secretary for Human Services Sherry Brasher and DHHS Division of Public Health, children and youth branch head Carol Tant; because of this report, Health Director Elaine Russell was able to prevent \$20,000 from being redirected elsewhere

Chairman Hawkins asked the Manager to provide a response to Edwin Jones, who spoke during public comment, on the County's preventative maintenance program.

Commissioner Chapman asked if the new Animal Services Director is scheduled to arrive as scheduled. The Manager reported yes.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Edwin Jones: Mr. Jones addressed his first comments to the Mr. Lovelace and Market Connections. He suggested the report, particularly the trend data, be made available to the local law enforcement agencies because they serve on the front lines for responses. Secondly, he reported that one of his Eagle Scouts recorded trails in the Dupont using a helmet-cam and loaded the information into an app for those interested in exploring Dupont. He offered to make the app available to the TDA and Market Connections as a link from their website.

### **COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS**

Commissioner Lemel reported on her County Commissioner activities since the last meeting. She reported that tonight a group of preschool and kindergarten teachers gathered to have a facilitated conversation about how to bridge the gap between the DHHS expectations of early learning and the DPI expectations of how to define kindergarten readiness. This will grow into a multi-week workshop for the preschool and kindergarten teachers to increase kindergarten readiness for our young children. The very first kindergarten readiness rally is scheduled for Thursday, April 7 at the Recreation Center. Agencies serving the 0-5 population will be represented and the Friends of the Library have purchased books for each child that attends. Commissioner Lemel has also been involved with planning a town hall meeting on childcare challenges which will occur on April 18 at the Library. The Library Foundation is the lead sponsor of the event. A light meal will be provided and a children's program is planned while the discussion occurs among parents about the challenges they face in the community with finding appropriate and affordable childcare. Commissioner Lemel helped facilitate the first meeting of the



Teens In Crisis Task Force. There were 47 people in attendance that had an interest in tackling this issue. She also met with the Manager and Jennifer Henderson with Blue Ridge Community Health Services, the health center that serves our uninsured and underinsured population, about the resources they provide to the community. On Friday she visited Meridian, the primary provider of mental health and substance abuse services, and learned about the many services they offer our citizens. Lastly, prior to arriving tonight, she visited the Cattleman's dinner and spoke on behalf of the Board, thanking them for their strong contribution to the agricultural community and local economy.

Commissioner Chappell thanked the Board of Elections and Elections staff for working through legislative and legal issues related to Voter ID and redistricting. He understands their frustrations. He pointed out that the second primary will result in a cost to counties that are more than likely not budgeted. There are many changes occurring at once and it takes a lot of individuals to make elections go smoothly.

**Chairman Hawkins moved to enter into closed session per NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (4) to discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of business in the area served by this body, after a 5-minute recess, seconded simultaneously by Commissioner Lemel and Phillips and unanimously carried.**

#### CLOSED SESSION

Pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (4) to discuss matters relating to the location or expansion of business in the area served by this body, closed session was entered into at 8:27 p.m. Present were Chairman Hawkins, Commissioners Chapman, Chappell, Lemel and Phillips, County Manager Jaime Laughter, County Attorney Tony Dalton, Transylvania Economic Alliance Executive Director Josh Hallingse, and Clerk to the Board Trisha Hogan. Closed session was held in the Arthur C. Wilson, Jr. conference room.

Commissioners received information about a potential economic development project and instructed staff on how to proceed.

**Chairman Hawkins moved to leave closed session, seconded by Commissioner Lemel and unanimously carried.**

#### OPEN SESSION

**Chairman Hawkins 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 Chappell and unanimously approved.**

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, **Chairman Hawkins moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Lemel and unanimously carried.**

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Mike Hawkins, Chair  
Transylvania County Board of Commissioners

ATTEST:

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Trisha M. Hogan, Clerk to the Board